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MASTERS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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THE VISION OF S. AUGUSTINE

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F. W. [illegible]

WITH A [illegible]

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
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THE VISION OF S. AUGUSTINE

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MASTERS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

BY

F. W. DRAKE

RECTOR OF KIRBY MISPERTON

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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PREFACE

THIS little book aims at quickening personal religion by recalling the lessons in the spiritual life which some of the great Masters of Devotion have left to us in their lives and in their writings. Next to the Bible itself, the lives of the Saints and their written counsel are the surest guides to holiness. Their experience is always an inspiration. Their counsel never grows old. But they are often too little known.

This book is meant to be a simple introduction to the study of some of their writings which are most accessible. In each chapter the same plan has been followed. After a short account of the spirit of the age in which they lived, comes a short biography, and then an outline of the chief characteristics of their teaching, with brief quotations from their books. It is hoped that in this way these treasures of devotion, which have nourished the spiritual life of the faithful in other ages, may be made to contribute more fully to the quickening and enrichment of our own religious life to-day.

No one who reads a book of devotion can afford to forget the wise caution of Scupoli: "This

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crucified Lord is the Book that I give you to read, from which you will be able to draw the true portrait of every virtue. For being the Book of Life, not only does it teach the intellect by word, but it inflames the will by a living example. The whole world is full of books, and yet all of them together are not able to teach you the way of acquiring all the virtues so perfectly as we can acquire them by gazing on the Crucified God."

F. W. D.

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NOTE

IN the chapters on S. Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, Scupoli, Francis de Sales, and William Law, the quotations from their works are made from the excellent and uniform editions of *The Confessions*, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Spiritual Combat*, *The Devout Life*, and *A Serious Call*, which are published in METHUEN'S LIBRARY OF DEVOTION. The quotations from Julian in Chapter II. are made from Miss Warrack's edition of *Revelations of Divine Love*, published also by Methuen & Co., Ltd.

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MASTERS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

I

S. AUGUSTINE AND "THE CONFESSIONS"

IN *The Confessions* of S. Augustine we have a work which finds no real parallel in all the literature of the world. It is not a theological treatise, though it illustrates freely the great religious truths which governed the mind of him who became the chief creator of the theology of Western Christendom. It is not a book of devotion, but it enumerates clearly the principles of penitence, faith, and love, which are the permanent elements of all Christian devotion. It is not a biography, though it deals intimately with the inner history of the supreme crises of a great man's life. It is the solemn address of a soul to God, recounting into the ears of Divine Love the penitent and grateful story of a life of many failures and repeated mercies. It is a book that speaks with equal vividness and power of intimate appeal to every age. It tells of a life spent in the crowded scenes of the busy cities of Italy and Africa more than fifteen hundred years

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ago. Yet in it we overhear the story of our own experience to-day, we see the picture of our own struggles and catch the promise of our own victory. Told with all the witchery of a sublime master of words, the story never palls. It rings with the undying interest of spiritual reality. It has the eternal charm of true romance—Love calling for love, Love faithful through sin and triumphant over all.

A.

When Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa in the year 354, the Church of Christ had already enjoyed nearly fifty years of peace and imperial favour. The first days of Christianity had been days of great danger and severe discipline. As long as the new religion could hide itself under the shadow of Judaism, which was a tolerated and favoured faith in Roman eyes, there was no danger of public persecution. But when Jerusalem fell, Christianity was brought into the open, and a period of grave peril followed. In wonderful ways the Church grew and prospered in the days of adversity. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. Common danger strengthened the bonds of Christian fellowship and kindled a spirit of glowing zeal and steadfastness. The dangerous days came when the last persecution was over and Constantine took the Church under his protection. Profession of

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Christianity became the way of promotion and of imperial favour. Men flocked into the Church from unworthy motives, uninstructed and unconvinced. In the heresies that arose the emperors took sides, and political obedience carried with it allegiance to the religious creed, whether orthodox or heretical, which the Emperor professed.

Augustine was born into the midst of the greatest struggle for the Faith which the Church has ever seen. The Deity of Christ, the very keystone of the Christian faith, had been challenged by Arius. Put under the ban of the Church by the decree of the Council of Nicæa, Arius had found a staunch supporter in the eastern emperor Constantius, who threw into the cause of heresy all the weight of his imperial influence and patronage. Augustine was three years old when all the great leaders of orthodoxy had been overborne, except Athanasius, and the whole world groaned to find itself Arian. Augustine in his teens must have watched the long struggle with interest, as he saw the Faith of the Church victoriously reasserted and vindicated by the vigorous championship of Athanasius and Basil. He was twenty-seven years old when the Council of Constantinople set its seal to the victory of the Nicene faith.

But already a danger, no less grave than heresy, was rending the unity of the Church in Africa. A schism had arisen which destroyed the peace and paralysed the progress of the Church. In a spirit of

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mistaken reaction against the moral laxity which years of peace had engendered and the persecution of Diocletian had revealed, a party of enthusiasts sought to purge the Church by excluding from its fellowship all who had proved unfaithful in time of danger, or who were deemed unworthy in life and conversation. The ministry, they urged, could only be exercised by those who were holy. The worthiness of the minister was in their eyes the indispensable condition of valid sacramental grace. The election of a bishop in vindication of these views in 311, in opposition to Caecilian, the duly consecrated Bishop of Carthage, was the beginning of this Donatist schism, which in Augustine's day numbered more than two hundred and fifty bishops, and challenged both in numbers and importance the Catholic Church of Africa itself. The outrageous violence of the Donatists, and their self-sought, and often self-inflicted, martyrdom produced perilous confusion in the Church life of North Africa. The position was all the more difficult, because on the great questions of belief which had convulsed Christendom they were at one with the champions of the Catholic faith. To a lover of Catholic unity like S. Augustine, nothing could be more desolating than the spectacle of a divided Church, no longer able to realise the treasures of its own inheritance, nor to evangelise the vast heathendom of Africa, because its brilliant endowments of learning and

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its passionate energies of zeal were being squandered on the wilful perpetuation of this pitiable schism.

But there was not only schism, there was heresy also which disturbed the unity of the Church in North Africa at the end of the fourth century. The great cardinal truths about God—the Unity of God and the Deity of Christ—had been securely vindicated as the result of the Sabellian and Arian controversies. It remained for a British monk, Pelagius, in a spirit of genuine moral earnestness, to question the very need of that grace which the Incarnation of the Son of God had brought for the uplifting of human life. There was no inborn weakness of sin, he said, in human nature which needed the help of Divine grace. Man's will, unaided and alone, was sufficient for all the tasks that God had laid upon human nature. Men had failed because they had not fully estimated their own natural powers. They only needed to be assured of their self-sufficiency to put forth an energy of will which had been withheld through ignorance and fear. Augustine at once saw the perils of such a doctrine. Rejection of Divine grace meant the denial of sin and the voiding of the whole purpose of the Incarnation. Augustine brought to bear upon this controversy a knowledge which was not only profound in its theology, but was the fruit of his own life's experience. He knew what were the limitations of human independence, he knew the need of Divine

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grace and the fulness of its power, he knew the weakness of human will and its need of renewal through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Pelagian heresy was significant of the spiritual needs of the last days of the fourth century. Men needed rousing to action. There was a growing lack of zeal, a waning sense of sin, a lowering of the moral ideal, and a rising spirit of intellectual pride, born of material prosperity and a rationalising temper which saw no beauty in holiness. Pelagianism is a peril which is always present in ages of great intellectual and scientific advance. It is well for us that in these days of its recrudescence we have the Catholic doctrine of Grace so clearly and so accurately vindicated in the terse and vigorous language of S. Augustine.

It was indeed an age of restless activity in which Augustine lived. The death of Theodosius the Great in 395, when Augustine in the prime of life was on the eve of his great episcopate, marked a crisis in the life of the Roman Empire. He had proved a sturdy, though intolerant, champion of the Church and a stout defender of the Empire. Theodosius had struggled with paganism, and amid the growing troubles of the Empire had preserved Italy from invasion. But in the incapable hands of his two successors the defence of the Empire was no longer safe. The ruthless advance of the barbarians could be no longer held in check. In 410

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Rome, the inviolable, was captured, sacked, and burned by the savage troops of Alaric the Goth. The fall of Rome stupefied the world and brought renewal to the life of paganism. Christianity, the pagans said, had wrought the downfall of Rome and the ruin of the Empire. As long as the old pagan sacrifices continued, Rome had been secure. But now, with the proscription of pagan rites and the growth of Christianity, the inevitable end had come.

Augustine at once took up the challenge, and in *The City of God*, which occupied his later years, he denounced the powerlessness of polytheism and laid bare the essential immorality of paganism, which was the true source of imperial decay, while he lifted men's minds beyond the glory of this world to see the true City of God in the sure and stable fellowship of the Church with its life of peace and purity on earth, based on the immutable laws of Christ and bright with the hope of immortality. It needed the genius of an Augustine to bring comfort and hope to a generation so sorely tried and so profoundly perplexed by the oncoming tide of the barbarian invasion. From Spain the Vandals crossed to Africa, and Numidia was ravaged by the pitiless hordes of Genseric. As the aged Augustine lay dying in Hippo, the city was already blockaded by land and by sea. The warning which he had uttered was coming home to his own people. The

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judgments of God were in all the land. The chastisements of the Lord were calling men to repentance, vindicating His holiness and creating a people for Himself out of the midst of desolation, famine, and the sword. What would Augustine have said could he have foreseen the future of that African Church, for which he so patiently, so lovingly, and so untiringly had laboured through the thirty-five years of his devoted episcopate? The barbarian desolation which he had seen when the Vandals besieged his dying bed at Hippo was renewed three centuries later in far more terrible guise, when the Moorish hosts swept over North Africa and put the Christians ruthlessly to the sword. Was it the judgment of God upon a Church that had not realised the Faith for which Augustine pleaded, that had not sought the unity for which he had so bravely striven, nor roused the energies of its will in loving missionary effort to build the City of God in those strongholds of paganism, in which he had already seen the hope of coming victory?

B.

The peculiar value of *The Confessions* in studying the story of S. Augustine is that it enables us to choose out of the countless activities of a crowded life just those events which were critical for the formation of his character and the development of his career. Our own judgment is aided by the inter-

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pretation which he himself gives to the continual leading of God by which his life was guided. It was at the request of his friends that Augustine wrote *The Confessions*. They had asked for the story of his life. He had now been Bishop of Hippo for some three or four years. He wanted to write in such a way that he neither veiled the weaknesses of his earlier life nor made himself the object of admiration and of praise. He wished men to realise that the precious secret of his life was the continual goodness of God, Whose guidance and love he recognised at every stage of his career. He wished the story of his life to be a song of praise to God. So might he make reparation for the long years of silence and forgetfulness. Therefore he chose to review his life in the form of a solemn confession to God. It should be the outpouring of a penitent and loving heart, with each fresh memory of the past renewing its thanksgiving and praise for the unfailing mercies of the Divine Love in Whom at length it had found rest.

Such a method of biography has its own dangers, especially for a man of Augustine's literary skill and dramatic temperament. But we can trust that his continual reliance on the Holy Spirit, his acute power of moral analysis, and his ardent humility have combined to guide him to a faithful remembrance of the way in which the hand of God had silently led him out of darkness into light, and had

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preserved him through so many dangers and temptations that he might bear witness to all ages of the Truth as it is in Christ Jesus and of the Hope which God inspires.

Augustine was born in the year 354 at Thagaste, a Numidian market-town in the north of Africa, where his father Patricius was a burgess of some local importance. Patricius was a pagan, but his wife Monnica was a Christian, who was allowed to pursue her habits of catholic devotion, not without remonstrance, but without active hindrance from her husband. Augustine was therefore in infancy made a catechumen, "signed with the sign of His Cross and seasoned with His salt." He was not yet baptized. In accordance with the frequent Christian habit of those days, the "cleansing" of baptism was deferred till later life, to avoid the graver peril of sin after baptism, "because after that bath the guilt and vileness of sin would be greater and more dangerous."

As a boy Augustine recalls his dislike of school and his great love of games. He remembers his first prayers to God that he might escape flogging. But as he gave no better heed to his lessons, his prayers were unanswered, and he gained his first experience of that law of prayer which S. James enunciates, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss." Soon the primary school of Thagaste gave way to the grammar school of the neighbouring

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town of Madaura, where he found his first sentiments of emotion stirred by the love-story of Dido, and gained his first triumphs in dramatic recitation before his classmates. Afterwards he could find no words of praise for an education which abjured all moral and spiritual training in favour of the nice delicacies of classical refinement.

The talent of Augustine could not be denied. His father, " who was but a poor burgess, with a spirit beyond his purse," ambitious that no educational advantage should be lost to his son, determined to send him to Carthage. But the expense was more than Patricius could immediately afford, and while he was raising money for the course at Carthage, Augustine was forced to spend an idle year at home. It was a dangerous interlude for such a lad. " While during that sixteenth year I kept complete holiday in idleness, enforced by straitened means, and lived in the society of my parents, the thorns of lust grew higher than my head, and there was no hand to root them up." " Behold with what comrades I roamed the streets of Babylon, and wallowed in the gutters as in spices and precious ointments. In the very centre of that city of sin the ghostly enemy trod me down and held me fast." The voice of God spoke to him through the warning words of his mother, yet it seemed to him that God was silent, and he strayed wantonly into sins of lust and theft, " merely for the

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pleasure of doing wrong." Augustine was always peculiarly sensitive to the influences of friendship. In Thagaste his comrades were a shameless fellowship, whose ways he was not strong enough to control nor brave enough to denounce.

At Carthage he found himself adrift in a larger world, for which he was ill equipped. He was still swayed by the unbalanced emotions of affection. "I was not yet in love, but I loved the idea of love. To love and to be loved was sweet to me." But such passion brought its own suffering, and in the pains which he endured he recognised the scourge and judgment of God. In the midst of such distractions Augustine did not forget his work. He attained the highest distinctions in the school of rhetoric, and was pursuing his studies ardently, when the whole course of his desires was changed by the reading of a treatise of Cicero, *Hortensius*, which kindled in him a love of wisdom. "That book changed my mind, changed my very prayers to Thee, O Lord, and altered my wishes and aspirations. From that moment vain hopes ceased to charm, and with a strange and heartfelt passion I began to live for the immortality of wisdom. Thenceforth began my upward way and my return towards Thee." His new quest after wisdom led him to turn to the Bible, in which he hoped to find the highest wisdom. But he was rebuffed by its want of literary beauty. Intellectual pride would not suffer him

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to read a book whose sentences were so uncouth, whose style was so simple and so unpolished.

But his desire for higher truth must find satisfaction somewhere, and in his new intellectualism he was caught by the specious wisdom of the Manichees. Their egregious philosophy, with its assumption of superior wisdom, with its defective sense of sin and ready tolerance of moral obliquity, seemed to suit Augustine's needs, and for nine years he was kept by the spell of Manichæism from any desire to learn more of the Christian faith, to which the prayers of his widowed mother were already beginning to draw him. " During this space of nine years, from the nineteenth to the twenty-eighth year of my age, I was misled and misleader, deceived and deceiver in various fond desires, openly by means of those arts and accomplishments which men call liberal, secretly in the cause of a false religion—now proud, now superstitious, always naught."

After a short term as schoolmaster at Thagaste, Augustine became a teacher of rhetoric at Carthage in 376. But the disorderliness of his pupils taxed both his patience and his skill, and after six years he left Africa for Rome, where he had heard that the scholars were better disciplined. But Rome had its difficulties as well as Carthage. It was a habit of the Roman pupils not to pay their fees. Augustine therefore seized the opportunity of a vacancy in the public professorship of Rhetoric at Milan to

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leave inhospitable Rome, and to journey north to the city of Ambrose, where Monnica was delighted to join him.

Manichæism had ceased now to exercise any hold over Augustine. He had found it wrong in its astronomical science, and Faustus, its most able champion, could no longer hide his ignorance about much which he had professed to know. Augustine had then turned to the Platonic teaching of the New Academy, to which he owed his first spiritual conception of the Being of God. He had always thought of God hitherto as "nothing but corporeal substance." Now in Ambrose he found a teacher who appealed both to his sense of beauty, his affections, and his powers of thought. Scripture unveiled to him its inner meaning and was justified in his eyes, as Ambrose unfolded the beauties of its spiritual teaching.

The preaching of Ambrose stirred in Augustine fresh thoughts about the human will, which was the cause of so much sin. Silently there sounded in his heart the murmur of Christian truth, which seemed to him, ever since he was made a catechumen, to have been his hidden possession. "For this Name, according to Thy loving-kindness, O Lord, this Name of my Saviour, Thy Son, my infant heart had sucked in with my mother's milk, and there it still was, hidden safe away." "And yet the faith of Thy Christ, our Lord and Saviour, taught me by

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the Catholic Church, stuck fast in my heart. As yet it was shapeless and wandered from the straight line of doctrine, nevertheless my mind never lost hold upon it, but drank it in daily more and more."

At this moment in his spiritual struggle Augustine turned for help to Simplicianus, " the spiritual father of Bishop Ambrose." Simplicianus told him of the conversion of the philosopher Victorinus, who in his old age, putting aside at last his fear of offending friends and yielding himself to the call of God, was baptized " to the great wonder of Rome and the great joy of the Church," and had proved his courage by deliberately choosing to make public profession of his salvation before all the people. Augustine was just in the same case as Victorinus—a public man, a brilliant teacher, practically convinced of the truths of Christianity, but afraid of his friends, hesitating to move, lacking the courage to give up the vanities and pleasures which held him down, unable to break with evil habit.

The story of another friend determined Augustine at last to break free from the chain of sensual sin. Pontitianus told him how two friends, inspired by reading the Life of Antony, had left the loves of this world and given themselves to God in the religious life. In an agony of conflict Augustine struggled with the new impulses to righteousness and obedience to the Will of God which urged him to immediate surrender. " I flung myself down under a fig-tree

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and gave my tears free course. I felt that I was held fast by my iniquities, and I went on wailing 'How long, how long? To-morrow and to-morrow? Why not now? Why not this hour make an end of my vileness?' Thus I spoke, weeping in bitter contrition of heart, when, lo, I heard a voice from the neighbouring house. It seemed as if some boy or girl, I knew not which, was repeating in a kind of chant the words, 'Take and read, take and read.'" Augustine could only interpret the voice as a Divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage he lighted on, as Antony had taken to himself the first words of the Gospel which he had heard on entering church. Picking up the book of his friend Alypius, he opened it and read in silence the passage on which his eyes first fell—"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." "As I reached the end of the sentence, the light of peace seemed to be shed upon my heart and every shadow of doubt melted away." Calmly Augustine told his friend Alypius what had befallen him, and to his surprise Alypius was ready to join him in his Christian profession. So the Divine Love had at length triumphed over the vain loves of earthly passion, and to the restless soul made for Himself God had brought peace.

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Augustine at once retired to a country house near Milan at Cassicium, where in the fellowship of that quiet retreat his friends Verecundus and Nebridius were won over to the Christian faith. Soon after, in the year 387, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose in Milan. "We were baptized, and all anxiety for the past fled away." So were the faithful prayers of Monnica at length rewarded, and with the hope of her life fulfilled she started back with Augustine for Africa. But at Ostia Monnica died, rendering to God a soul filled with thanksgiving for the Divine mercy of her son's conversion, and praying that at the Altar of God she might find continual remembrance.

Augustine never swerved from the path on which God had now set his feet. Returned to Thagaste, he sold his little property and lived a simple community-life with a few friends, until in 381 he was ordained to the priesthood to help the aged Bishop Valerius at Hippo. For fourteen years he laboured faithfully in the priestly life, attaining eminence both by his brilliant championship of the Catholic Faith and by his devoted labours on behalf of Church unity. It was inevitable that he should be called to the episcopate, as Valerius grew too old for the burden. Consecrated Bishop in 395, one year before the death of Valerius, Augustine remained sole Bishop of Hippo for thirty-five years. The history of his labours is the history of the African Church. In every Council his was the guiding voice.

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In every controversy it was he who was the champion of the Church against its foes, be they Arians, Pelagians, Donatists, or Manichees. His literary industry remains a marvel. Correspondence with friends, Commentaries on Scripture, profound Treatises on the Faith, Refutations of Heresy—Augustine amid all the innumerable burdens of the episcopate found time for them all. And through all his work and life there runs the continuous sense of the Divine Presence and the call of Divine Love, of which *The Confessions* are the witness. Dedication, humility, obedience, self-sacrificing diligence, utter love of the Truth, adoring reverence and fear of God—these are the marks of discipleship which the life of Augustine bears. In him God has shown the magnificent power of His converting grace. In him we see what glorious enrichment of all the faculties of life awaits the soul that yields itself to the enabling call of God. No Christian teacher has ever left such an enduring mark upon the religious thought of all ages as S. Augustine. At every crisis in the life of the Western Church it has been to the writings of Augustine that men have turned. Schoolman and Mystic, Schismatic and Catholic, Jansenist and Jesuit—all alike have drawn new inspiration from the profound theology, the religious insight, and the intense personal devotion of Augustine, the Pilgrim and the Apostle of Divine Love.

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C.

The Confessions of Augustine reveal effectively to the thoughtful reader the religious inspiration of a life that is truly hid in Christ. For while it is the record of years of wasted opportunities and selfish pleasure and forgetfulness of God, the story is told with such a deep spirit of humble penitence, such a trustful dependence upon the power of God's protection, and such a faithful acceptance of the fulness of the Divine pardon, that the reader moves in the felt Presence of God, and is conscious rather of the eternal constancy of the Divine Love than of the merely human interest of Augustine's narrative.

Augustine has a very reverend conception of the Majesty of God. That spirit of adoring approach to God, which is so lacking in our own life of prayer, finds repeated expression in his devotion. God is to him the God of awe, the terrible Judge, the Omnipotent Creator, the Ruler of the world. It is as impossible for man to comprehend the infinite God as it is for a child to pour the sea into the little hole which he has dug upon the shore. Yet at the same time he realises that close and intimate personal fellowship with God which enables him to use terms of the dearest human affection and to appeal to Him in every circumstance of life as his

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own Friend, his cherished Hope and Light and Joy. The very first words of the book are an ascription of praise to God, as the natural offering of man to his Creator.

Great art Thou, O Lord, and highly to be praised. Great is Thy power, yea, and Thy wisdom is infinite. And man would praise Thee, because he is one of Thy creatures. Yea man, though he bears about with him his mortality, the proof of his sin, the proof that Thou, O God, dost resist the proud, yet would man praise Thee, because he is one of Thy creatures. Thou dost prompt us thereto, making it a joy to praise Thee. For Thou hast created us unto Thyself, and our heart finds no rest until it rests in Thee. [i. 1.]

And as the prelude to the story of his life, Augustine sets this noble confession of the Majesty and ineffable Perfection of God:

What art Thou, then, my God, save the Lord God? For what God is there but the Lord, or what God but our God? Highest, best, most mighty, most almighty—most merciful, most just—most far and yet most near—fairest yet strongest—fixed yet incomprehensible—unchangeable, yet changing all things—never new, yet never aged—renewing all, yet bringing the haughty into decrepitude and they know it not. Ever busy, yet ever at rest—gathering, yet never needing—bearing, filling, guarding—creating, nourishing, perfecting—seeking, though Thou hast no lack. Love is Thine without passion, jealousy without alarms, repentance without sorrow, anger without disorder. Thou changest Thy works,

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but not Thy purpose. Thou takest what Thou findest and dost never lose. Never poor art Thou, yet delighting in gain, never covetous, yet exacting usury. Men give Thee more than Thou dost claim, that Thou shouldest be their debtor, yet who possesses aught that is not Thine? Thou payest debts which Thou dost not owe. Thou forgivest debts and losest nothing. What can I say, my God, my Life, my holy Joy? [i. 4.]

This passage illustrates the natural way in which Augustine passes from the contemplation of God's majesty to the simplest terms of personal devotion. This intimate apprehension of the nearness of God is shown by the wide variety of titles by which he addresses God. God is his own very personal possession. It would suggest a happy enrichment of our own prayers to collect together some of these terms of invocation, which rise so spontaneously to the lips of Augustine as he speaks to God. It is not only that, as he writes, ejaculatory prayers rise from his heart, called forth by the memory of the Divine mercies, but his conception of the intimacy of God with the soul of His redeemed is so rich, so constant, and so stimulating.

O Lord God, Thou Ruler and Creator of all nature —my God and Lord—O God, the Light of my heart, Thou hidden bread of my soul, Thou mighty Husband of my mind and of the bosom of my thought —O Lord my God, Thou best and most excellent

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Creator and Ruler of the world—O my God, my Joy, my Glory, and my Confidence—O Justice and Innocence, fair and lovely with heavenly light—O my God, my Merciful One—O Light of my heart—my Love for whom I faint, that I may be made strong—O Life of my soul—O Thou almighty Goodness who carest for each one of us, as if Thou caredst for him alone—O Fount of Pity—O Fount of Mercies—O Most High, who never forsakest our clay—O Eternal Truth, and true Love and lovely Eternity.

Such are some of the titles which reveal the reality of Augustine's fellowship with God and are suggestive for our own devotion.

It is this God so near, so intimate, so infinite in mercy and in love who had been ever calling Augustine to find rest in Him. *The Confessions* make very real to us this quiet, persistent call of Divine Love, which waits for the response and obedience of every soul, whose patience is never wearied, whose resources are never exhausted, whose appeal is never hushed. Augustine had a dim feeling through all his life that the Catechumenate which he had entered upon as a child, combined with the unconscious influences of his mother's faith and prayers, had always made him subtly responsive to the power of the Sacred Name. " This Name of my Saviour, my infant heart had sucked in with my mother's milk, and there it still was,

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hidden safe away." The teaching of the Catholic Church, which he had listlessly heard, stuck fast in his heart, and his mind never lost hold upon it. He was always conscious of this drawing towards the truth. He could never rest apart from it. And the cause of his restlessness was always the same. He would not submit his will to the guidance of his heart and the direction of his better reason. He was always self-indulgent. He had a nature singularly lovable. Life was made easy for him by the affection of all those by whom he was surrounded. His will remained undisciplined. As a professor, in class he was a poor disciplinarian. He knew that he was always hesitating and deferring moral decisions that ought to be made at once. He regards the story of his life as one great lesson in the power of the human will and the need of its education and discipline for the happiness of life. He knew the vanity of prayers that were mere words, mere wishes, not determinations of the will to accept the Will of God. The supreme moment of his conversion was the moment when he resolved to delay no longer, but to obey at once. It was the recovery of his will that meant for him the discovery of Christ.

One thing lifted me up towards Thy light. It was that I had come to know that I had a will, as certainly as I knew that I was alive. And so, when I willed to do or not to do anything, I was absolutely sure that I, and not somebody else, willed it, and I was

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beginning to perceive that there lay the cause of my sin [vii. 3].—As yet I was bound by the iron chain of my own will. The enemy held fast my will and had made of it a chain, and bound me tight therewith. For from a perverse will came lust, and the service of lust ended in habit, and acquiescence in habit produced necessity. These were the links of what I call my chain, and they held me bound in hard slavery. But the new will which had sprung up in me, the will to serve Thee for nought and to enjoy Thee, O God, the one certain joy, was not yet strong enough to master the old time-hardened will. So my two wills, the old and the new, the carnal and the spiritual, were in conflict, and their discord paralysed my soul [viii. 5].—I was weak and chose the easier place, and for this single reason my whole life was one of listless indecision. I had already found the goodly pearl. I ought to have sold all that I had and bought it, and yet I could not make up my mind [viii. 1].—On the very threshold of my youth I had even begged of Thee the gift of chastity, but I had said, "Give me chastity and self-control, but not just yet" [viii. 7].—I kept saying within myself, O let it be now, let it be now. And as I spoke the word I was on the verge of resolution. I was on the point of action, yet I acted not [viii. 11].

And what the power of the redeemed will can be in human life is shown by the industry, the devotion, the steadfast holiness, the firm discipline, and the profound spiritual peace which ruled the life of Augustine after the day of his conversion.

The Confessions reveal a profound knowledge of Scripture. Augustine had been repelled at first by

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the uncouth diction of the sacred text. The versions which he read failed to do justice to the beauty and simplicity of the original text. He acknowledged that it was pride which made him refuse to study wisdom revealed in such humble guise. But it was not only in the literary style of the Bible that he found difficulties. Its stories seemed foolish and some of its facts impossible. And it was not till the flowing eloquence and persuasive teaching of Ambrose commended the allegorical interpretation of Scripture to him, that the Bible yielded up to him its hidden treasures of Divine truth. He felt that Scripture came to him with the express authority of the Divine sanction to disclose and explain that which by the mere light of reason he could never discover.

Since we are too weak to discover the truth by the mere light of reason, and for this cause need the authority of Holy Writ, I began to believe that Thou never wouldest have assigned such eminent and world-wide authority to Scripture, unless it had been Thy will that through it Thou shouldest be believed and through it sought. For by this time I could find an explanation for the contradictions that used to repel me in the depth of its mysteries, having heard many of them reasonably explained, and its authority appeared to me all the more august, and all the more worthy of reverential faith, because, while all might read it, it shrouded the grandeur of its inmost thought within the deeper meaning, appealing to all by its plain and homely speech,

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and tasking the attention of those who are not light of heart, welcoming all in its hospitable arms, and guiding to Thee through narrow crannies a few, yet far more than it could have done, if its authority were not so highly exalted that it drew the multitude within the bosom of its holy humility [vi. 5].

Of all " the august writings of Thy Spirit," it was the writings of S. Paul that especially appealed to Augustine and taught him the meaning of Grace. By actual quotation and by facile allusion in many a simple phrase Augustine shows his intimate knowledge of the Bible. Had we not known it from his sermons and his commentaries, we could tell from *The Confessions* alone how dear the Scriptures had become to Augustine, and how the Bible language came readily to his use. This is one way in which Augustine exemplifies the true foundations of the devotional life. There can be no safe knowledge of God without the love of His Word and frequent meditation upon its sacred text.

Augustine's life shows at once the beauty and the danger of human friendship. With his lovable nature he gathered friends about him wherever he was. He was never alone. Gradually he learned by bitter experience where the secret of true friendship really lay. Only God can give and consecrate true friendship. God, Who is Love eternal and holy, can alone create and bless all relationships of earthly love.

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Friendship is not true, unless Thou dost form the bond between them, who cleave to Thee with that love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us [iv. 4].—Blessed is he who loves Thee and his friend in Thee and his enemy for Thy sake. He alone loses no dear one, to whom all are dear in Him, Who is never lost [iv. 9].—The Word Himself calleth thee to return, and in Him is the untroubled place of rest, where love, that forsakes not, is never forsaken [iv. 11].—If souls delight thee, let them be loved in God. For they too are changeful and go their way and perish, unless fixed and established in Him. Let them be loved then in Him [iv. 12].

It was a soul thus capable of love which the Divine Love drew to Himself, that love might be perfected in Christ. There was a stage when fear and not love was the great motive to a better life. " Nor did anything call me back from a deeper pit of carnal pleasures but the fear of death and of Thy judgment to come, which throughout all the changes of my opinions, never faded from my breast." But love, as it grew perfect, cast out fear, and Augustine attained to a fellowship of Divine Love which transfigured all his life with the conscious nearness of God, and gave him flashes of insight into mysteries of the Divine Life which words could not express. It was so that at Ostia, in loving converse with Monnica " on that eternal life of the saints, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man," passing from earthly

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love to love divine, he touched the sunlit heights of Vision, and reached out to the Eternal Wisdom that abides above all.

As our converse drew to this conclusion, that the sweetest conceivable delight of sense in the brightest conceivable earthly sunshine was not to be compared, no, nor even named, with the happiness of that life, we soared with glowing hearts towards the same, mounting step by step the ladder of the material order, through heaven itself, whence sun and moon and stars shed their radiance upon earth. And still higher did we climb by the staircase of the spirit, thinking and speaking of Thee and marvelling at Thy works. And so we came to our own minds, and passed beyond them into the region of unfailing plenty, where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth, where Life is Wisdom by which all these things come to be, both the things that have been and the things that shall be. And the Life itself never comes to be, but is, as it was and shall be evermore, because in it is neither past nor future but present only, for it is eternal. And as we talked and yearned after it, we touched it for an instant with the whole force of our hearts.

We said then, " If the tumult of the flesh were hushed, hushed these shadows of earth, sea, sky, hushed the heavens and the soul itself, so that it should pass beyond itself and not think of itself, if all dreams were hushed and all sensuous revelations and every tongue and every symbol, if all that comes and goes were hushed. (They all proclaim to him that hath an ear, we made not ourselves, He made us, Who abideth forever.) But suppose that having delivered their message, they held their peace,

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turning their ear to Him Who made them and that He alone spoke, not by them, but for Himself, and that we heard His word, not by any fleshly tongue, nor by an angel's voice, nor in the thunder, nor in any similitude, but His voice Whom we love in His creatures. Suppose we heard Him without any intermediary at all. Just now we reached out, and with one flash of thought touched the Eternal wisdom that abides above all. Suppose this endured and all other far inferior modes of vision were taken away, and this alone were to ravish the beholder, and absorb him, and plunge him in mystic joy, might not eternal life be like this moment of comprehension for which we sighed? [ix. 10.]

In such words we have a glimpse of that mystic Vision which comes of the Love of God. They speak of that true fellowship of which all our devotion is a real experience. For us too, as for Augustine, the Divine Love waits. " There is none who can hide himself from Thy sunshine." We too can trust ourselves to the Divine protection, " for Thy omnipotence is not far from us, even when we are far from Thee." We who, like Augustine, " love the blessed life " must " will wholly " to seek it now, and " humbly hold the humble Lord Jesus " in the ways of daily obedience and sacramental fellowship. Taught by this pilgrim of Love, we shall find in God the glory and the joy of life. Thanksgiving and the praise of God shall make our life perfect. " Thanks be unto Thee, O my God,

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my Joy, my Glory, and my Confidence. Thanks be unto Thee for all Thy gifts. But do Thou keep them safe for me. For then Thou wilt keep me safe, and Thy gifts will increase and be made perfect. And I shall be with Thee, for even my being is Thy gift." Prayer and penitence shall keep us close to God. "Come, Lord, and work. Arouse us and incite. Kindle us, sweep us onwards. Be fragrant as flowers, sweet as honey. Teach us to love and to run."

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II

JULIAN OF NORWICH AND "REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE"

IN the *Revelations of Divine Love* we have a record of English mediaeval devotion which reveals the spiritual history of a life of rare simplicity and insight. The language is the quaint idiom of the fourteenth century. The style is very simple and clear, touched with that naïve charm of originality which sincerity and genius give. Truths which, in the language of to-day, have ceased to appeal either to heart or mind, reveal in themselves new beauties and new depths of meaning as they come to us clothed in the picturesque garb of Lady Julian's exquisite diction.

A.

The life of Julian of Norwich was a long one, extending over almost a century, from 1342 to 1441 —a stirring century in English history. The battles of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt, which marked the long contest of England and France,

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were all fought in her lifetime. The end of the fourteenth century saw the decay of feudalism and the uprising of new social conditions. Both the Black Death of 1349 and Wat Tyler's rebellion of 1381 marked in different ways the arrival of great economic changes in the life of England. A new spirit of nationality was struggling to the birth, and with it there came a new consciousness of individual independence, and a growing effort to assert the rights of personal freedom both in the sphere of politics and of religion. The effects of the rising spirit of national self-assertion already showed themselves in the life of the Church.

The prestige of the Papacy suffered a sad eclipse in the fourteenth century. The Pope, imprisoned at Avignon, became the tool of the French kings, and the Papal power was degraded in the general esteem of Christendom. Corruption and immorality disgraced the Papal court and spread widely through all the higher ranks of the clergy. The schism which followed the captivity helped to loosen the hold of the Papal government upon the obedience of a united Christendom. The degradation of the Papacy meant the loss of the greatest unifying and spiritual power which had yet been brought to bear upon the nations of Europe. In England the spirit of the people was shown in the Statutes of Provisors and of Praemunire, which restrained the exercise of the Papal influence and power in these

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islands. The English Church was far enough removed from the Papal court not to be much influenced by its evil moral example. It was the financial exactions and the political usurpations of the Papacy that were the great scandal in England. It was these which gave special colour to the movement of religious reform inaugurated by John Wycliffe.

New social theories and political ideals came first. Doctrinal reformation followed in their train. England was in the throes of the Lollard movement during the greater part of Julian's life. Julian herself reflects none of these unbalanced innovations. She is content with the primitive faith and government of the Catholic Church. Her book represents Catholic truth at its purest and best. It suggests how, amidst the many unprimitive accretions and doctrinal extravagances that marked the practical teaching of the mediaeval Church, there were those who moulded their lives steadfastly and happily upon the great fundamental and unquestioned truths of the primitive Faith. Already signs were not wanting in England, both in the movements of Church and of State, of that great upheaval, which in the course of a century was to reassert Catholic purity and primitive tradition through the desolating violence of the Reformation. But in Julian there are no marks whatever that she wrote upon the eve of so momentous an epoch.

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But if there are no signs of these coming changes in her writings, it was not from want of living sympathy with the events of her own time. The echoes of all the eager and stirring movements of the day came to the ears of the Lady Julian as she dwelt in her "cell" in Norwich, uplifting her "meek, continuant prayer" for all the needs of her fellow-countrymen. Norwich, with its great woollen manufactures, was then one of the first commercial cities of the kingdom, and reflected in its life all those turbulent industrial and social movements which were beginning to change the face of the nation. Although she could not mix with the busy life of the great city, yet its news came daily to her ears.

Julian had consecrated her life to the work of an Anchoress or Recluse. Brought up in the Benedictine nunnery of Carrow, she gave herself as a solitary to the work of continual contemplation and prayer, and lived in the "Anchorage," which adjoined the east end of the little church of Conisford, near Norwich. Here with her two maids she continued "to serve our Lord with inward beholding of His blessed goodness." The life of an anchoress in such conditions was not one of utter loneliness. The room which she occupied in her little house had three windows. One looked into the Church and gave her a view of the altar, enabling her to share in the public worship of the village. Another opened into her maids' room, and afforded oppor-

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tunity for their regular service. The third looked out upon the churchyard, and to this inquirers and seekers after spiritual counsel had access. Over this was hung a black curtain marked with a white cross, which the anchoress drew aside whenever she held converse with those who sought her prayers or craved her counsel. In this way Julian took her part in the life that pulsed so vigorously about her.

The vocation which Julian had chosen was one which had attractions for many devout souls in the Middle Ages. The life of the anchoret or anchoress in England was a revival of the contemplative life which had flourished so wonderfully in the early centuries in the Thebaid and among the recluses of Syria. While these anchorets gave themselves chiefly to prayer and meditation, using a simple rule which was most fitted to their individual conditions, they were also able to help their fellowmen both by material bounty and by spiritual counsel. Thus, though they were confined to the narrow limits of their cells, they were never out of reach of the influences of their day, nor deprived of that converse with the world which gave new reality and fresh direction to their life of prayer.

Of the life of Julian we know nothing beyond the details which she tells us in her book. It is no set autobiography, but the record of Revelations and Visions granted to her by God, which she felt were not meant for herself alone. "In all this I

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was greatly stirred in charity to mine even-Christians, that they might see and know the same that I saw, for I would it were comfort to them. For in all this time I weened to have died; and that was marvel to me and troublous partly, for methought this Vision was showed for them that should live. And that which I say of me, I say in the person of all mine even-Christians, for I am taught in the spiritual showing of our Lord God that He meaneth so. And therefore I pray you all for God's sake, and counsel for your own profit, that ye leave the beholding of a poor creature that it was showed to, and mightily, wisely, and meekly behold God that of His courteous love and endless goodness would show it generally, in comfort of us all. For it is God's will that ye take it with great joy and pleasance, as if Jesus had showed it to you all."

She has no wish to draw attention to herself. She is only the medium of the Divine revelation to others. But in giving us the *Revelations of Divine Love*, which sustained her own faith and gave her such spiritual joy, Julian unveils the secret of one of the most happy and lovable souls that the history of the saints has ever known. Constantly she had prayed for three gifts from God. To deepen her love for God and to quicken her sense of sin, she desired a bodily sight of Christ's Passion. The second desire was for a serious illness which should come to her in youth. And the third prayer was

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that she might "receive three wounds—the wound of very contrition, the wound of kind compassion, and the wound of steadfast longing towards God." In the year 1373, when she was just thirty years old, the first two petitions were suddenly granted. Without any warning she fell ill, sick, as it seemed, unto death. On the fourth night she "took all the rites of Holy Church, and weened not to have lived till day." For three days more she lingered, and then, when death seemed almost to have come, the priest set the Cross before her face and said, "I have brought thee the image of thy Maker and Saviour, look thereupon and comfort thee therewith." Then as with failing eyes she looked, all grew dark about her save the Cross, which glowed with a new light. All the pain left her, life revived, and the graphic Visions of the Passion followed, which in the year 1393 she faithfully recorded, having carefully waited till the revelation of those hours of sickness had been renewed and interpreted by twenty years' experience of the Grace and Comfort of the Holy Spirit.

B.

Julian is a Mystic. That spirit of Mysticism which abroad showed itself so conspicuously in the works of Tauler, Suso, and Ruysbroeck, found expression in England in the thought of Richard Rolle of

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Hampole, Walter Hylton of Thurgarton, and Lady Julian. Of all these Julian is the most simple and the most original. The essence of Mysticism is union with God. This mystic union is based upon the soul's love of God, and is realised in a conscious spiritual fellowship. Mysticism may or may not express itself in ecstasy, rapture, and states of unusual psychic experience, but wherever it is, it is the creation and expression of love which links together in one bond of inseparable union the soul of the creature and the heart of the Creator. The mystic has an intense and living sense of union with God. For him all other relations tend to become unreal except that fellowship which exists between the soul and God. To the mystic all things reflect God. Among the manifold objects of created life the mystic pursues his search after unity, and that unity has its beginning and its end in God.

To the mystic God is the explanation of all things, and he can never rest till he has related everything to God and found in Him the ultimate reality and unity of all created things. Tennyson writes in the mood of the mystic when he says that if he could understand the little flower which he holds, root and all, in his hand, if he could understand what it is, " root and all, and all in all," then he would know what God and man is. In the same spirit Julian holds a little hazel-nut in the palm of her hand, and looking upon it, links it at once with the Author of all and

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says, "It lasteth and ever shall last, for that God loveth it. And so all things have their Being by the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third that God keepeth it. But what is to me verily the Maker, the Keeper, and the Lover, I cannot tell. For till I am in essence united to Him, I may never have full rest nor very bliss; that is to say, till I be so fastened to Him, that there is right nought that is made betwixt my God and me." That is the true spirit and manner of the profound mystic, who cannot rest till that which is seen yields its message of the unseen, and who must find for himself direct intercourse and fellowship with God without any intermediary.

The way of the mystic is beset with two great temptations, from both of which Julian keeps herself free. She neither mistakes the place of Vision in the spiritual life, nor depreciates the Sacraments of the Church. They are dignified by her as the normal means of the bestowal of Divine Grace and of the attainment of fellowship with God. The special visions which came to her as the extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit receive their due and rich interpretation through the customary grace of the Spirit. Twenty years of the "soft comfort and blissful touching of the Holy Ghost" are allowed to throw their light on the Divine revelations vouchsafed to this "simple, unlettered creature," before she records

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them for the general comfort of all her fellow-Christians.

Nor is Julian led away by the sense of special Divine guidance and the experience of unwonted nearness to God into any neglect of either the common faith or the common sacraments of the Church. "In all things I believe as Holy Church believeth, preacheth, and teacheth. For the faith of Holy Church, the which I had aforehand understood, and, as I hope, by the grace of God earnestly kept in use and custom, stood continually in my sight, I willing and meaning never to receive anything that might be contrary thereunto."

And the Catholic doctrine of the Divine use of media for fellowship with God could not be more truly nor more beautifully expressed than in these words of Julian. "God of His goodness hath ordained means to help us, full, fair, and many, of which the chief and principal means is the blessed nature that He took of the Maid, with all the means that go afore and come after, which belong to our redemption and to endless salvation. Wherefore it pleaseth Him that we seek Him and worship through means, understanding that He is the Goodness of all."

C.

As becomes a true mystic, Julian makes the Love of God the centre of her hope and happiness. She

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seizes upon the lowliness and individual nearness of the Divine Love, God's "homely loving."

Our soul shall never rest till it cometh to Him, knowing that He is fulness of joy, homely and courteous, blissful and very life.—For truly our Lover desireth that our soul cleave to Him with all its might, and that we be evermore cleaving to His goodness. For of all things that heart may think, this pleaseth most God and soonest speedeth the soul [vi.].

It is the very majesty and splendour of God which enhance the tenderness and beauty of His love for us. It is a love which passes the understanding of every creature which He has made, a love which is even one with the Love bestowed by the Father upon His own dear and glorious Son. The beholding of such a Love fills the human soul with reverence and humility. Love is the very root and ground of our life. It is a holy delight in God, born of truth and wisdom.

Our God and Lord that is so reverent and so dreadful is so homely and courteous [vii.].—Our soul is so specially loved of Him that is highest, that it overpasseth the knowing of all creatures. That is to say, there is no creature that is made that may fully know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly our Maker loveth us. And therefore we may with grace and His help stand in spiritual beholding, with everlasting marvel of this high, overpassing, unmeasurable Love that Almighty God

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hath to us of His goodness. And therefore we may ask of our Lover with reverence all that we will [vi.]. —Because of this great, endless love that God hath to all mankind, He maketh no disparting in love between the blessed Soul of Christ and the least soul that shall be saved [liv.].—The beholding and the loving of the Maker maketh the soul to seem less in his own sight, and most filleth him with reverent dread and true meekness, with plenty of charity to his even-Christians [vi.].—Truth seeth God and wisdom beholdeth God, and of these two cometh the third, that is, a holy, marvellous delight in God, which is Love [xliv.].—Our life is all grounded and rooted in love, and without love we may not live [xlix.].

And so fifteen years after the Revelation had been made to her, Julian learned that the whole purpose and meaning of it were summed up in the word Love.

From that time that it was showed I desired oftentimes to learn what was our Lord's meaning. And fifteen years after, and more, I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: Wouldst thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this? Learn it well. Love was His meaning. Who showed it thee? Love. What showed He thee? Love. Wherefore showed it He? For Love. Hold thee therein and thou shalt learn and know more in the same. But thou shalt never know nor learn therein other thing without end.—Thus was I learned that Love was our Lord's meaning [lxxxvi.].

The stooping and condescension of God in His love never cease to move Julian to wonder and gratitude.

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God is near to her beyond all expression, and reveals Himself in marvellous "homeliness and courtesy" to those that love Him. No one has ever expressed, in terms of such simple beauty, the close fellowship with God which the Incarnation has bestowed upon human life. It is God's homely appeal for man's response of homeliness.

He that is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is lowest and meekest, homeliest and most courteous. The most fulness of joy that we shall have is the marvellous courtesy and homeliness of our Father, that is our Maker, in our Lord Jesus Christ that is our Brother and our Saviour [vii.].—Our courteous Lord willeth that we should be as homely with Him as heart may think or soul may desire. But beware that we take not so recklessly this homeliness as to leave courtesy. For our Lord Himself is sovereign homeliness, and as homely as He is, so courteous He is, for He is very courteous. And the blessed creatures that shall be in heaven with Him without end, He will have them like to Himself in all things [lxxvii.].

Julian has wonderful words of comfort for those who in love seek God and yet can come to no clear vision. God asks us only to seek, to suffer, and to trust. "Seeking is as good as beholding" in His sight, if only we seek diligently, with unmurmuring steadfastness and with the assurance of deep faith. And every fresh vision that is granted only increases our desire for further seeking still. That is the way

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of all true spiritual desire. "I saw Him and I sought Him. I had Him and I wanted Him." And vision in itself is no profit unless it means growth in love. "Because of the showing I am not good, but if I love God the better."

The lonely anchoress knew what it was in her search after God to experience dryness, weariness, and heaviness of spirit, as well as to enjoy moments of great sweetness.

After this He showed a sovereign ghostly pleasance in my soul. This lasted but a while, and I was turned and left to myself in heaviness and weariness of life and irksomeness of myself that scarcely I could have patience to live. There was no comfort nor none ease to me, but faith, hope, and charity. And these I had in truth, but little in feeling. This vision was showed me that it is speedful to some souls to feel on this wise, sometime to be in comfort, and sometime to fail and to be left to themselves. God willeth that we know that He keepeth us even alike secure in woe and in weal. And for profit of man's soul, a man is sometime left to himself, although sin is not always the cause. But freely our Lord giveth when He will and suffereth us to be in woe sometime. And both in one love [xv.].

But wonderfully through all her suffering Julian was upheld by a certain assurance of delight and bliss, which wells up again and again like some joyous fount of happiness on almost every page of her writing. It is the very spirit of blitheness and

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deep-souled gaiety which marked the devotion of Francis of Assisi. No moments of dryness must be allowed to mar the glad contentment of our spiritual life. Even the vision of sin only fixes the eyes of the penitent more surely on the glad bliss of the eternal victory, which the Passion of Christ has won. Pain passes. Bliss alone is eternal. God is always a delight and joy. He takes His bliss in us and we in Him. Even in the saddest experiences of the prison-house of this life, there is the joy of Christ's Presence, which drives away all sorrow. The soul is daily renewed in that bliss of God which is a foretaste of the happiness of heaven.

It is God's will that will hold us in comfort with all our might, for bliss is lasting without end and pain is passing and shall be brought to nought for them that shall be saved. And therefore it is not God's will that we follow the feelings of pain in sorrow and mourning for them, but that we suddenly pass over and hold us in endless enjoyment [xv.].—He willeth that we be as assured in hope of the bliss of heaven while we are here, as we shall be in sureness while we are there. And ever the more pleasance and joy that we take in this sureness, with reverence and meekness, the better pleaseth Him [lxv.].—This place is prison and this life is penance, and in the remedy He willeth that we rejoice. The remedy is that our Lord is with us, keeping and leading into the fulness of joy. For this is an endless joy to us in our Lord's signifying, that He that shall be our bliss when we are there, He is our keeper while we are here [lxxvii.].—He loveth and enjoyeth us, and

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so willeth He that we love and enjoy Him and mightily trust in Him [lxviii.].

For all her assurance of joy, Julian was not blind to the sorrow and the pain which mingled with the happiness of life. But the certainty of Christ's Presence, with its transfiguring power, continually dispersed the clouds of suffering and left the world bathed in sunshine.

We have in us, for the time of this life, a marvellous mingling both of weal and woe. We have in us our Lord Jesus uprisen, we have in us the wretchedness and the mischief of Adam's falling, dying. By Christ we are steadfastly kept, and by His grace touching us we are raised into sure trust of salvation. And by Adam's falling we are so broken, in our feeling, in diverse manners by sins and by sundry pains, in which we are made dark, that scarcely we can take any comfort. And thus we stand in this medley all the days of our life. But He willeth that we trust that He is lastingly with us. And that in three manner. He is with us in Heaven, very Man, in His own Person, us updrawing. He is with us in Earth, us leading. He is with us in our Soul, endlessly dwelling, us ruling and keeping [lii.].

The Passion of Christ was stamped upon her soul in a very memorable vision, which brought before her gaze the inexpressible agonies of human pain, which the Man of Sorrows endured upon the Cross. But above all the horror of that vision of suffering there shone the glory of the ineffable love of God.

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In a wonderful passage Julian speaks of the infinite merits and universal efficacy of the Precious Blood of Jesus.

The dearworthy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ as verily as it is most precious, so verily it is most plenteous. The precious plenty of His dearworthy Blood descended down into Hell and burst her bands and delivered all that were there which belonged to the court of Heaven. The precious plenty of His dearworthy Blood overfloweth all earth and is ready to wash all creatures of sin which be of good will, have been and shall be. The precious plenty of His dearworthy Blood ascended up into Heaven to the blessed Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and there is in Him, bleeding and praying for us to the Father, and is, and shall be as long as it needeth, and ever shall be as long as it needeth. And evermore it floweth in all Heavens enjoying the salvation of all mankind, that are there and shall be [xii.].

The Passion of Christ is "the overcoming of the fiend." The meaning of Sin rises before the Saint's mind, and causes her no disquiet as she gazes upon the sublime victory of the Cross. "It behoved that there should be sin. But all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well." For in the Cross Julian saw the inspiration of true Penitence, which she describes in these sympathetic words:—

Sin is the sharpest scourge that any chosen soul may be smitten with, which scourge thoroughly

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beateth man and woman and maketh him hateful in his own sight, so far forth that afterwhile he thinketh himself is not worthy but to sink in hell—till contrition taketh him by touching of the Holy Ghost and turneth the bitterness into hopes of God's mercy. And then he beginneth his wounds to heal and the soul to quicken as it is turned unto the life of Holy Church. The Holy Ghost leadeth him to confession, with all his will to show his sins nakedly and truly, with great sorrow and great shame that he hath defouled the fair image of God. Then receiveth he penance for every sin, as enjoined by his doomsman, that is grounded in Holy Church by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. And this is one meekness that greatly pleaseth God [xxxix.].

The penances that are most valuable are those which God Himself ordains, and sweet is the care which the gentleness of the Saviour bestows upon the soul that sins, lest it be swallowed up in despair or lost in darkness.

Full preciously our Lord keepeth us, when it seemeth to us that we are near forsaken and castaway for our sin, and because we have deserved it. And because of meekness that we get hereby, we are raised well-high in God's sight by His grace, with so great contrition and also compassion and true longing to God.—But our courteous God willeth not that His servants despair, for often nor for grievous falling. For our falling hindereth not Him to love us [xxxix.].—This is a sovereign friendship of our courteous Lord that He keepeth us so tenderly while we be in sin, and furthermore He toucheth us

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full privily and showeth us our sin by the sweet light of mercy and grace [xl.].—Specially and highly and with full lovely manner of look was it showed me that we shall meekly bear and suffer the penance that God Himself giveth us, with mind in His blessed Passion.

Even our falls may be turned to happy use, if they are allowed to reveal the enduring and inexhaustible love of God. Apart from our falls we should never know how feeble and how wretched we are of ourselves, nor should we ever appreciate the tenacity and faithfulness of the Redeemer's love, nor turn with such readiness to the unfailing intercession of the Church for strength and safety.

For we shall see verily in heaven without end that we have grievously sinned in this life, and notwithstanding this we shall see that we were never hurt in His love, we were nevertheless of price in His sight. And by the assay of this falling we shall have an high, marvellous knowing of love in God without end. For strong and marvellous is that love which may not, nor will not, be broken for trespass [lxi.].—He willeth that we take us mightily to the Faith of Holy Church and find there our dearworthy Mother, in solace of true Understanding, with all the blessed Common. For one single person may oftentimes be broken, but the whole Body of Holy Church was never broken, nor never shall be, without end.

In many passages of tender beauty Julian speaks of the gentle care which Jesus bestows upon each

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soul, whether in sorrow or in joy, in holy service or in sin. All the natural duties of a mother are ascribed to the Saviour in tending the souls for whom He died.

All the fair working and all the sweet natural office of dearworthy Motherhood is impropriated to the second Person [lix.].—Our kind Mother, our gracious Mother, for that He would all wholly become our Mother in all things, He took the ground of His works full low and full mildly in the Maiden's womb. Our high God is sovereign Wisdom of all. In this low place He arrayed and dight Him full ready in our poor flesh, Himself to do the service and the office of Motherhood in all things. The Mother's service is nearest, readiest, surest—nearest, for it is most of nature; readiest, for it is most of love; and surest, for it is most of truth. This office none might, nor could, nor ever should do to the full, but He alone.—The mother may give her child suck of her milk, but our precious Mother, Jesus, He may feed us with Himself, and doeth it, full courteously and full tenderly, with the Blessed Sacrament that is precious food of my life. And with all the sweet Sacraments He sustaineth us full mercifully and graciously [lx.].

In Christ, too, lies the secret of all human prayer. The secret of delight in prayer lies in the recognition of Christ Himself as the Source and Fulfiller of all prayer. He is the ground of our beseeching. It is not the emotion of delight, but " the goodwill and the travail of His servant, howsoever we feel," that

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God accepts. It is our large trust that God looks for. He does not ask for the impossible. He takes delight in our prayer, for it is the means of union to which the soul turns when it seeks to be obedient to God. Prayer is a vision of God, anticipating that day when we shall "see God face to face homely and fully."

I am ground of thy beseeching. First it is My will that thou have it. And after I make thee to will it, and after I make thee to beseech it and thou beseechest it [xli].—Beseeching is a true, gracious, lasting will of the soul, oned and fastened into the will of our Lord by the sweet inward work of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord Himself, He is the first receiver of our prayer, as to my sight, and taketh it full thankfully and highly enjoying. And He sendeth it up above and setteth it in the Treasure, where it shall never perish [xli.]—Full glad and merry is our Lord of our prayer [xli.].—This is our Lord's will, that our prayer and our trust be both alike large [xlii.].—Prayer is a right understanding of that fulness of joy that is to come, with well-longing and sure trust [xlii.].—Prayer oneth the soul to God. When our courteous Lord of His grace showeth Himself to our soul, we have that which we desire [xliii.].—When the soul is tempested, troubled, and left to itself by unrest, then it is time to pray, for to make itself pliable and obedient to God. But the soul by no manner of prayer maketh God pliant to it, for He is ever alike in love [xliii.].—Then shall we, with His sweet grace, in our meek continuant prayers come unto Him now in this life by many privy touchings of sweet spiritual sight and feeling,

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measured to us as our simpleness may bear it [xliii.].

Thus by the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are made through our life of prayer perpetual co-operators with God. And this co-operation, which the power of the indwelling God Himself creates in us, is described with exquisite insight in these words: "It is His good pleasure to reign in our understanding blissfully and sit in our soul restfully, and to dwell in our soul endlessly, we all working into Him. In which working He willeth that we be His helpers, giving to Him all our attending, learning His lores, keeping His laws, desiring that all be done that He doeth, truly trusting in Him." Such a life of happy and continuous co-operation is possible because the indwelling of God in man is of such a nature that "worshipfully He sitteth in the soul, in peace and rest. The Godhead ruleth and sustaineth heaven and earth and all that is—Sovereign Might, Sovereign Wisdom, and Sovereign Goodness—but the place that Jesus taketh in our soul He shall never remove it without end, for in us is His homeliest home and His endless dwelling."

There is no doubt in Julian's mind as to the manner of the Divine Approach. It is not in ecstasy, nor trance, nor contemplation, but in sacrament that the Divine Love gives Himself to the faithful soul. And the soul that humbly and eagerly accepts

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the sacramental way of Divine fellowship enters into the joy of God. "God showed full great pleasance that He hath in all men and women that mightily and meekly and with all their will take the preaching and teaching of Holy Church. For it is His Holy Church. He is the Ground. He is the Substance, He is the Teaching, He is the Teacher. He is the End. He is the Meed for which every kind soul travaileth."

It is to such heights of true and lasting joy in God that the vision of the Passion of Christ can lead us. The Cross is indeed the supreme revelation of Love. Man is often tempted, like Julian, to look elsewhere for the vision of heaven, when he is himself suffering on earth. "Look up to Heaven to His Father" is the specious appeal of Satan when our troubled eyes are turned towards the Cross. It is then that we who have learned the ways of Divine Love must make the brave choice of Julian: "I learned to choose Jesus to my Heaven, whom I saw only in pain at that time. Meliked no other heaven than Jesus, which shall be my bliss when I come there." Even as we gaze upon the suffering Son of God and renew our penitence before the Cross, we are to remember that "He loveth and enjoyeth us, and so willeth He that we love and enjoy Him and mightily trust in Him and all shall be well." It is this sublime confidence in the victory of the Love of God revealed in such lowly

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and such " homely " guise through the Incarnation, which is the master-lesson of Lady Julian's life. The Cross is the mighty appeal of Love. Fellowship with the Passion of Christ, however won, whether by meditation, sacrament, suffering, or prayer, will reveal to us too the secret of that mighty and victorious joy which Julian so lovingly possessed. The redemption, the sanctification, the perfection of each separate soul must be part of that " joy which was set before Him," which inspired the Blessed Saviour to endure the Cross and despise the shame. It must be ours, as we tread in the footsteps of the Crucified and enter more fully into the revelation of God's Love, to offer to our Lord and Saviour the joy of a soul happily reunited to Him in perfect holiness through the merits of His atoning Death and the power of His glorious Resurrection. Love is indeed the beginning and the end of life, the clue to all its mysteries, the secret of all its suffering. The experience of Lady Julian will at length be ours also: " I saw full surely that ere God made us, He loved us. Which love was never slacked, nor ever shall be. And in this love He hath done all His works. And in this love He hath made all things profitable to us. And in this love our life is everlasting. In our making we had beginning. But the love wherein He made us was in Him from without beginning, in which love we have our beginning. And all this shall we see in God, without end."

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III

THOMAS A KEMPIS AND "THE IMITATION OF CHRIST"

THERE is probably no devotional writer who has appealed to such a wide and such a varied circle of readers as Thomas a Kempis. By men and women of every age and every creed and system of thought *The Imitation of Christ* has been enthusiastically received as a book which touches the deepest springs of spiritual thought and personal devotion. It is the beautiful record of an actual experience. "It remains to all time," wrote George Eliot, "a lasting record of human needs and human consolation, the voice of a brother, who ages ago felt and suffered and renounced—in the cloister perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts and a manner of speech different from ours, but under the same silent, far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness." That is the secret of the book's great charm. It is the faithful transcript of a soul, gifted with no special endowments of intellect,

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favoured by no special opportunities of birth, visited by no special fervours of spiritual ecstasy, but through all the weary trials and perplexities of the religious life held steadfast to its high vision and gladdened by fellowship with God.

A.

Thomas a Kempis was born in 1380, and he died in 1471. His long life was passed in those eventful years which saw the close of the Middle Ages and preluded the great movement of the Renaissance. Just before his birth the terrible scourge of the Black Death had swept across Europe, working greater havoc and bringing more violent social changes than the fiercest wars. And Thomas was in his seventy-third year when the Fall of Constantinople placed Eastern Europe at the mercy of the Turk and flooded the West with the ancient learning of the Greeks. Both these events, so different in their several effects, helped to emphasise the passing away of Mediaeval Europe. It was an age of turbulent change and seething unrest. Empire and Papacy alike, round which the ideals of Mediaeval Europe were gathered, had now been tested and had been found wanting. The thirteenth century had seen the fall of the Empire under Frederick II. After his failure the Holy Roman Empire could no longer hope to gather under its universal sway the

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forces of a united Christendom. Not only was Italy now lost to the Empire, but in all the other states of Europe the rising spirit of nationality had begun to assert its disintegrating power. With the decay of the great feudal oligarchies in the fourteenth century, France, Spain, and Germany alike felt the pressure of this new national spirit, and great military monarchies arose which broke up for ever the unity of the Empire. The age of Thomas a Kempis was thus marked in the political world by seething turbulence, confusion, and unrest.

In the history of the Church it was a critical period too. Boniface VIII. had revealed the failure of the Papacy to control the respect and the obedience of Christendom. The work of Gregory, Hildebrand, and Innocent, who had successively aggrandised the power of the Papacy as the supreme and ruling force in Europe, had been undone by the submission of Boniface to the French captivity at Avignon. Two years before Thomas was born the Papacy had received a further blow in the Great Schism, which began in 1378 and for years divided the allegiance of Europe. The Papal court became a very sink of moral degradation, the centre of every vile and venal intrigue. The Councils of Pisa and Constance, of Basle and of Florence, tried in vain to restore unity and to institute reform in Papal government and conduct. The unbridled licence of the Popes was reflected in the cruel insolence of the

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great prelates and in the scandalous vices which too often marked the lives of the clergy. The ideal of holiness seemed lost to the Church. No one could say that the imitation of Christ was the great characteristic of the life of the Church in the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Monastic life had failed to preserve the ideal of Christian holiness. The great revival of the tenth century had run its course. The decay of discipline and the decay of learning had gone hand in hand. The monasteries had ceased to be the pioneers of culture and the patterns of holy life. While the religious houses were generally free from the grosser vices, they were no longer the homes of devotion and of zeal. Indifference, doubt, selfishness, and comfort had eaten out the heart of their spiritual power and usefulness. Often they had become mere boarding-houses for the retainers of the wealthy. All the best spiritual activities of the time had been drawn into the Franciscan and Dominican movements. It was for an age that was beginning to despise the monastic life that Thomas drew his inimitable picture of the true Religious.

In France and Italy and Germany universities were rising which took the place of the monasteries as seats of learning. They had sprung suddenly into unexpected power from their claim to arbitrate between the Popes and the Councils. Dominicans and Franciscans had thrown themselves

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with ardour into the spirit of the new learning, that they might find new support for the teaching of the Church, and the universities became the strongholds of Scholasticism. The teaching which the Schoolmen offered was very formal and pedantic, based upon logic and philosophy, purely intellectual in its nature, making no spiritual appeal, and as strikingly wanting in intellectual originality as it was in spiritual fervour and power. Thomas a Kempis, who had himself escaped the formal training of the Schools, speaks frequently of the barren intellectuality, the futility, and the subtle pedantry of Scholastic learning. "Better a humble peasant who serves God, than a proud philosopher who studies the course of heaven and neglects himself. What doth it profit thee to lecture profoundly on the Trinity, if thou be void of humility and thereby displeasing to the Trinity?" The new learning, as Thomas had seen it, had not contributed to greater holiness of life. The moral confusion of the age and its spiritual darkness remained unrelieved by all the efforts of Scholasticism.

It was difficult to see from what source help could come to repair the moral ruin of the age. There were not wanting voices that called loudly for reform. Gerson in his theological treatises appealed for a reform of the Church from within. Dante in majestic verse, Petrarch in letters, Boccaccio, Langland, and Chaucer in popular poems, the universities

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in their outspoken criticism, Wycliffe with his new social aspirations, visionaries like Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena with their prophetic zeal—all these were voices crying passionately for reform.

The reaction against the intellectualism of scholastic thought and the corruption of moral life had already taken the form of Mysticism, in which Tauler, Suso, and Ruysbroeck were the great leaders. And inspired very largely by the teaching of these mystics, a definite movement of spiritual reform began to show itself among all classes in the country of the Upper Rhine. It was a practical attempt to reassert the realities of holiness and the claims of personal religion, in which monks, clergy, nobles, merchants, and agricultural labourers all alike took part. There was no breach whatever of Church order, no desire whatever to question its Faith or Authority, no attempt to separate from the unity of the Church, but it was an endeavour to supplement the ministrations of the clergy with the organised help of the faithful amongst the laity. Communities were formed under the name of "the Friends of God," who with simple and eloquent preaching and every form of Christian social activity set forward the cause of personal holiness. The movement was a very practical witness to the profound desire for spiritual reformation which was stirring in the hearts of the people.

One of the societies started under the impulse of

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this mystic revival of personal religion was "The Brotherhood of the Common Life," founded at Utrecht by Gerard Groot in the very year in which Thomas a Kempis was born. Groot was a brilliant graduate of the University of Paris, who had studied canon law, and, layman as he was, had been made Canon of Utrecht and Aix-la-Chapelle. Suddenly aroused from a life of purely intellectual interest to a deep sense of personal religion, he spent three years in retreat in a Carthusian monastery, was ordained deacon, and began a ministry of earnest and effective preaching of repentance in Deventer, Zwolle, and Utrecht. But he realised that the most hopeful opportunity for establishing true and lasting principles of spiritual reform lay in the schools. He therefore set himself to organise a system by which trained men of true, religious earnestness might be sent to control the religious education of the schools in the chief towns. To this end he instituted two separate foundations. First, he gathered together in "Brother-houses" those who were ready to devote themselves to this work of teaching. Living together in a fellowship of work and worship, they were called "The Brothers of the Common Life." A passage out of the statutes of one of their Houses will best explain the nature of their life and the simplicity of their aim. "We have proposed to ourselves for the salvation of our own souls and for the edification of our neighbours in the purity of

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the Christian faith and the unity of our Mother, the Holy Christian Church, to live together in common by the labour of our hands in the service of God, and in chastity and in agreement with each other. We desire to lead a simple life without begging, to yield respectful obedience to our superiors, to wear a plain and humble habit, to observe the canons of the Holy Fathers, as far as they bear upon our affairs, and to follow sacred services and studies with diligence. We desire not only to lead a blameless life ourselves, but also to offer a good pattern and example, and to assist in the conversion of others, and we trust that God may deign to move and convert the hearts of others by our means."

Thus the Brothers worked for their living, chiefly by copying manuscripts, and taught without charge in the grammar schools, where their aid was gladly welcomed by the municipal authorities. But it was soon discovered that the teachers needed a central house where they themselves might be systematically trained under a stricter discipline both of study and of worship. Thus Groot was led to inaugurate monasteries, with the closer obligations of conventual life, into which the Brothers might pass, if they wished, from the Brother-houses either to take monastic vows themselves or to be trained in the work of education. For this purpose he chose the Augustinian rule as the basis of his new foundation, because it was the most easily adapted

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to that combination of manual work and spiritual discipline which he felt to be the ideal of the Religious Life. Of both these institutions Thomas a Kempis had experience. In the Brother-house at Deventer Thomas learnt his first lessons both in devotion and in letters, and at the Monastery of Mount S. Agnes he passed seventy-two years of his life. Such was the sound and effective scheme by which Gerard Groot brought new and holy influences to bear upon the youth of his generation. In all his undertakings Groot found an able supporter in Florentius Radwyn, whose profound reverence, gentle discipline, and gracious spirit of devotion left an indelible mark upon the soul of his ardent disciple Thomas a Kempis.

The work of the Brothers continued to exercise a marked influence upon the cities of the Rhineland for more than a century. The Brothers of the Common Life were in every way loyal to the principles and organisation of the Catholic Church. But their ardent advocacy of the study of the Scriptures presently laid them open to suspicions of heresy and schism, which were none the less harmful because they were quite groundless. In the first violent moments of religious disruption which attended the innovations of Luther, it was very easy to read into the Brothers' earnest devotion to the Bible in the Church, the errors of those rising Protestant sects who presumed to find in their

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new studies of the Bible justification for repudiating the established order of Church government and worship. At the same time the introduction of printing very largely curtailed the work of copying and writing, upon which the Brothers had chiefly depended for their maintenance. When the Reformation on the Continent had run its course, the Brothers of the Common Life had disappeared, and the work of religious education had passed into the hands of the Jesuits, the most vigorous representatives of that new spiritual movement which within the Church itself was seeking to restore purity, zeal, and devotion. But though the organisation of the Brothers passed away, their influence continued, and had they left no other record of their work than *The Imitation of Christ*, they would have made an imperishable mark upon the devotion of the Church for all ages.

B.

Like Gregory Nazianzen and Francis de Sales, Thomas was the child of many prayers. His father was an artisan of Kempen, a village forty miles north of Cologne, in the bishopric of Utrecht. Both his parents were devout and God-fearing, and it must have been due largely to the earnest devotion of his mother, that from his earliest years Thomas was brought up in the atmosphere of simple piety

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and religion. Her eldest son John, who was sixteen years older than Thomas, had already shown the fruit of his religious upbringing and had joined the Brothers of the Common Life, and had become prior of their monastery at Mount S. Agnes. When Thomas was thirteen years old he was sent to the town of Deventer, following the steps of his brother, and became a pupil at the Song-school of the Cathedral, where the religious education was in the hands of the Brethren, and under the immediate direction of Florentius Radwyn. At first Thomas was put out to live with a matron in Deventer, while he attended the school. He soon became a favourite pupil of Florentius, whose saintly devotion and reverence made a profound and lasting impression upon the eager lad. The other great influence which helped to quicken in Thomas a high ideal of Christian devotion was the earnestness of a fellow-pupil named Arnold. "I was set on fire," said Thomas, "by the fervour of his prayer, and I desired to feel sometimes a devotion like that which he felt every day." After six years at the school at Deventer, during the latter part of which he was taken to live in the Brother-house with Florentius, Thomas passed on to the Monastery of the Brethren at Mount S. Agnes, where his brother John was prior. There for ten years he took part in the life of the Brethren, serving them, worshipping with them, and receiving instruction in the finer

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arts of writing and copying, until in 1409 he was ready to take the monastic vows. The next five years were spent in special preparation for the priesthood, which he received in 1414, at the age of thirty-four. What that preparation meant for Thomas, we can gather from the words in which he afterwards reveals his ideal of the priesthood:—

Behold, thou art made a Priest, and consecrated to celebrate. See now that thou offer sacrifice to God faithfully and devoutly and at fit opportunities. And bear thyself without reproach. Thou hast not lightened thy burden, but art now bound with a straiter band of discipline, and art obliged to a greater perfection of holiness. A Priest ought to be adorned with all virtues and to set example of good life to others. His conversation should not be in the popular and common ways of mankind, but with the angels in heaven or with perfect men on earth. A Priest clad in sacred garments is Christ's deputy, that with supplication and humility he may beseech God for himself and for the whole people. He has before him and behind the sign of the Lord's Cross, that he may continually be reminded of the Passion of Christ. He wears the Cross before him on the chasuble, that he may diligently look on Christ's footsteps and earnestly study to follow them. Behind he is signed with the Cross, that he may cheerfully endure for God's sake any evils inflicted on him by others. Before him he bears the Cross, that he may mourn for his own sins, behind him, that he may with sympathy weep over the faults of others also, and know that he has been placed in the midst between God and the sinner, and that

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he should not flag in prayer and holy oblation, till he prevail to obtain grace and mercy. When a Priest celebrates he honours God, rejoices angels, edifies the Church, helps the living, gives rest to the dead, and makes himself partaker of all good things [iii. 5].

These words suggest the very spirit of the life to which Thomas was now fully dedicated. In accordance with the rule of the Brothers, he took due part in the domestic duties of the house and fulfilled in turn the different offices of the Monastery. His life was one of quiet meditation and study, combined with assiduous activity in writing and copying manuscripts. Except for three years when the whole brotherhood left the diocese of Utrecht during an interdict, and when he was called to the deathbed of his brother John, Thomas a Kempis spent the whole of his long life in the House of Mount S. Agnes. He loved the quiet life of contemplation, prayer, and devotional study. The frequent conferences, which were a feature of the regular life of the House, with their free interchange of spiritual confidences between the Brethren, must have helped both to deepen his own spiritual insight and to confirm his influence as a guide and adviser of others in the life of devotion. Thomas himself had personal knowledge of the difficulties of the higher spiritual life, which gave him his power of deep sympathy with the needs of others. The chronicler of the

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Monastery, who gives a brief record of his life among the Brethren, says, "In the early days of his monastic life he went through many necessities, temptations, and labours." And the spell which his writings lay upon souls so diverse and so different is derived from the reality of the deep spiritual experience out of which he speaks with such intense humility and candour.

Out of this life of simple labour and earnest devotion in the cloister, hidden from the hideous turmoil of the age, came the books which we know as *The Imitation of Christ.* The first three books were finished by 1425, and the whole four are found in a completed form written out with other devotional treatises in his own hand sixteen years later.

In the interval Thomas had been largely occupied with the task of writing out a copy of the whole Bible for the use of the Monastery, a work which must have been for him a peculiar labour of love and happiness. The treatises were catalogued by Thomas himself under the name of their opening words, without any special title, except the third book, in the case of which he prefaces the opening words with the title "On the Sacrament." It is important to notice that Thomas places the book on the Sacrament third and not fourth in his list, the longest book of all "Of internal consolation" coming last. The title "Of the Imitation of Christ,"

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which is the original title of the first book only, seems not to have been used as the comprehensive title of the whole four books till thirteen years after the death of Thomas, but from that time the title has gained universal currency.

The book is a revelation of the heart and life of its author. Its perfect beauty of style and diction is the mirror of a soul stayed firmly upon God, who with clear vision and unclouded faith can speak with absolute sincerity of the joyful mysteries of a life lived in humble dependence upon the Divine Love. The simple sentences, crisp and terse in phrase, with their delicate rhythm and pregnant brevity, defy translation. It has all the dignity of language in which the Bible excels, the vigour and beauty of diction which are associated with the best writing of Augustine and Bernard, and all the smooth and facile rhythm of the familiar phrases of the Church liturgy. It is the echo of all the gathered voices which he had heard in choir, the refrain of the sequences, antiphons, and hymns which sounded perpetually in his heart, the memory of the inspired words of Scripture and the treasured wisdom of the saintly Fathers, the fruit of years of quiet meditation which he almost unconsciously recalled.

It is no wonder that such beauty and wealth of sacred thought, linked to such perfection of literary style, should make an irresistible appeal to the best men and women of every age. The wonderful

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sympathy of *The Imitation of Christ*, its simple sincerity and sweet humility, its tender charity and ardent love of truth, its spirit of eager zeal, its clear depth of spiritual insight, its frank conviction and its happy faith, combine to make it attractive to every earnest seeker after spiritual peace. It is a legacy of peace left to us from an age of unceasing strife and confusion. The long years of quiet meditation and spiritual discipline which Thomas spent in the tranquillity of the cloister have brought comfort to many a soul besides his own. The brief words in which the monastic chronicler speaks of his last years, and of the sufferings of his old age, suggest the Source of the patience, sympathy, and enduring faith which so consistently marked the life of Thomas a Kempis : " He had a very loving devotion to the suffering Saviour, and he possessed the gift of consoling the tempted and the sad. At last, when he became very old, he was troubled with dropsy in the legs, and fell asleep happily in the Lord."

So in the year 1471 was this faithful servitor of the Lord laid to his rest in the eastern vault of the Monastery of Mount S. Agnes, where for seventy-two years he had sought to show men how the humble and loving imitation of Christ is the earthly way of happiness and peace.

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C.

The Imitation of Christ makes such a universal appeal, because it is the simple and true record of a soul to whom spiritual experiences were very real. It deals with the foundation facts of practical religion. It treats of the deep principles, which underlie that fellowship with God, which is the ideal of every good and earnest soul. It is free from all vagueness, indefiniteness, and abstraction, because it is based upon the revelation of God in Christ. Thomas a Kempis found in the religion of the Incarnate the immediate and full satisfaction of all the practical needs of his own soul. It was the truthfulness of the Christian faith to the actual facts of life, as he knew them, that wrought in his tried and tempted soul such strong conviction. The certainty of his simple and lucid faith, the absolute sincerity of the spiritual experiences of his life in Christ, the naïve tone of certitude in which he speaks of the deepest mysteries of a soul struggling towards perfection and upheld through all temptation and difficulty by the power of the Cross, the resolute confidence with which he proclaims sacrifice and renunciation as the condition of spiritual progress—these constitute the charm and mark the irresistible appeal of the work of Thomas. It is a normal experience, a sane and patient discipline, a wise and gentle sympathy which his life reveals.

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There are no eccentricities of ascetic rigour, no transcendent states of spiritual ecstasy, no psychical surprises. All is regular and intelligible, compelling our admiration, commanding our sympathy, and inviting imitation. So we turn hopefully to this book to find the principles of the spiritual life, which are true to our own experience to-day.

No one who reads *The Imitation* as a whole can fail to recognise how Thomas makes the Sacraments the true foundation of the devotional life. The very order in which the author himself arranged the books is significant. First comes the appeal to the imitation of Christ, with its call for rigorous renunciation and self-discipline. Then follows the revelation of the conditions necessary for the attainment of the inner life—peace, purity of intention, a good conscience and, above all, the love of Jesus and the readiness to take up our cross and follow Him. Then comes the actual fellowship with Jesus, effected by the sacramental union of the Eucharist, to which the third book is wholly devoted. And after that comes the book of internal consolation, in which the soul is taught to hold colloquy with Jesus the Divine Guest, upon Whose sure and certain Presence the joy of all spiritual life depends. Thomas a Kempis was a Mystic who found his union with God not in any vague or indefinable communion of spirit, but in the definite and divinely promised certainties of Sacramental fellowship at

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the Altar. It was a fellowship the joy of which might not immediately be recognised, but the certainty of which might always be confessed in simple faith and realised in humble service. It was a fellowship which was not a rare experience, but the frequent and regular habit of the devout soul.

Here in the Sacrament of the Altar Thou art wholly present, my God, the Man Christ Jesus [iii. 1]. —Keep my heart and body undefiled, that with a cheerful and pure conscience I may be able frequently to receive to my everlasting health Thy Mysteries, which Thou didst specially ordain and institute for Thine own honour and for a never-ceasing memorial [iii. 2.]—For this is the one chief consolation of the faithful soul, so long as it is on pilgrimage away from Thee in this mortal body, that remembering its God, it should often receive its Beloved with devout mind [iii. 3].—Whosoever with a single heart lifts up his intention to God and empties himself of all inordinate liking or disliking of any created thing, shall be the most fit to receive grace and meet for the gift of devotion. This man when he receives the Holy Eucharist obtains the great grace of divine union, because he regards not his own devotion and comfort, but the honour and glory of God above all devotion and comfort [iii. 15]. —Blessed is the simplicity, which leaves the difficult ways of dispute and goes forward in the plain and solid path of God's commandments. Many have lost devotion whilst they sought to search into things too high. Faith is required of thee and a sincere life, not height of understanding nor depth of mysteries of God. Go forward therefore with simple

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and undoubting faith, and draw near to the Holy Sacrament with suppliant reverence, and whatsoever thou art not able to understand, commit securely to Almighty God. For faith and love do here specially take the lead, and work in hidden ways in this most holy, most supremely excellent Sacrament [iii. 18].

These words suggest the paramount place of importance which Thomas a Kempis assigns to the Sacrament of the Altar in the devout life, and those who use the devotions of preparation and thanksgiving for Communion, which the third book contains, will enter more and more into that spirit of wonder, thankful adoration, humility, and love with which Thomas felt the Blessed Sacrament ought always to be approached.

Familiar to him as it is to every earnest and devout man of prayer was the experience of dryness and deadness at times of devotion. From the frequent reference which he makes to it, it would seem that it had been one of his own special difficulties. His counsel is always clear and definite. The consciousness of special joy in devotion and sensible recognition of the Divine nearness are the special gift of God, and not the indispensable token of reality and earnestness. For one who, like Thomas, lived a life of meditation and prayer, this must have been one of his greatest trials, and he had learned how to bear it and how to make use of the discipline of

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this experience for the deepening of his faith and love.

The grace of devotion should be waited for, with good hope and patience [iii. 15].—When spiritual comfort is given thee from God, receive it with thankfulness, but understand that it is the gift of God, not any desert of thine. Be not uplifted, be not too joyful nor vainly presumptuous, but rather be the more humble for that gift, more wary too, and fearful in all thine actions, for that hour will pass away and temptation will follow. When consolation is taken from thee, do not immediately despair, but with humility and patience wait for the heavenly visitation, for God is able to give thee back again more ample consolation [ii. 9].—Comfort shall at times be given thee, but the abundant fulness thereof shall not be granted [iv. 49].—All is not lost because at times thy heart is not stirred towards Me or My saints as thou wouldst. That good and sweet affection which thou sometimes feelest, is the effect of grace present and a foretaste of thy heavenly home. But thou must not lean thereon too much, for it comes and goes [iv. 6].—When the spirit of fervour is kindled, thou shouldst consider how it will be when that light departs. And when this happens, remember that the light may return again, which as a warning to thyself and for Mine own glory I have withdrawn for a time [iv. 7].—Leave comforts to God, let Him do therein as seemeth Him good. Do thou set thyself to endure tribulations and count them the greatest comforts [ii. 12].

The secret of the life of devotion is Humility. It was a lesson which the age of Thomas a Kempis had

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never learned. No one has taught it by precept and by example so sweetly and so convincingly as he. "Love to be unknown" might well be called the motto of his life. Humility is presented not as cowardice nor as a diffident refusal of duties, but as the safeguard of the effective power of grace, the condition of true fruitfulness and abundant service, the source of tranquillity and inward peace.

To be always doing well and to think little of one's self, is the mark of a humble soul [ii. 6].—If thou hast any good, believe better things of others, that thou mayest preserve humility [i. 7].—If thou wilt know or learn anything to profit, love to be unknown and to be little esteemed. This is the deepest and most profitable reading, the true knowledge and contempt of ourselves. To make no account of ourselves and to think always well and highly of others, is great wisdom and perfection [i. 2].—A humble knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God than a deep search after learning [i. 3].—Now will I teach thee the way of peace and true freedom. Study to do the will of another rather than thine own. Choose always to have less rather than more. Seek always the lowest place and to be inferior to all. Wish always and pray that the Will of God may be wholly fulfilled in thee [iv. 23].

Renunciation is part of the Way of Humility. Man must be ready to strip himself of all that is not God and to submit himself thus chastened and disciplined to the moulding influences of Divine Love. Man's sin demands it and his deepest instincts of

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imparted holiness approve it. Above all the Cross of Jesus sanctions, consecrates, and blesses it. There is no more beautiful chapter in all the literature of devotion than the last chapter of the second book, "Of the Royal Way of the Holy Cross," which exalts the Cross of Christ as the way of Divine salvation and the only hope of man.

In the Cross is salvation, in the Cross is life. In the Cross is protection from enemies, in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness. In the Cross is strength of mind, in the Cross joy of spirit. In the Cross the sum of virtue, in the Cross perfection of sanctity. There is no salvation for the soul, nor hope of eternal life, but in the Cross. Take up therefore thy Cross and follow Jesus, and thou shalt go into life eternal. Lo, in the Cross is all, and there is no other way to life and true inward peace, but the way of the holy Cross and of daily mortification. Walk where thou wilt, seek what thou wilt, thou wilt find no higher way above, nor safer way below, than the way of the holy Cross [ii. 12].

Renunciation is a strong assertion of the power of the will. But that is not the only way in which the will controls the life of devotion. Thomas a Kempis recognised in the spiritual life of the age in which he lived a fatal want of zeal and fervour. He had marked also in the life of the novices under his instruction, as well as in his own life, how necessary it was to keep alive the true spirit of devotion

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by frequent daily renewal of fresh acts of will and obedience. There could be no endurance of suffering, no acceptance of discipline, no understanding of the difficulties of spiritual progress, unless there were zeal and glowing enthusiasm for Christ. Progress must be slow, but it may be made daily, if the will be stirred to renewed activity as each day offers fresh opportunity of service, discipline, and obedience. Violence must be done to self, if evil habits are to be overcome and growth in holiness assured. This is one of the truths of the spiritual life to which Thomas most frequently recurs.

No place is safe, if the spirit of fervour be wanting [iv. 27].—Who hath a harder battle than he that strives to overcome himself? And this should be our business, to conquer ourselves and daily wax stronger than ourselves and make some growth in holiness [i. 3].—We seldom overcome any one vice perfectly, and do not burn for daily progress, therefore we remain cold and lukewarm [i. 11].—Two things in particular help to great amendment, to wit, to pull ourselves violently away from that to which nature is viciously inclined, and to labour zealously for that good which we most want [i. 25].—If thou give thyself to zeal, thou shalt find peace and feel toil lighter. The more violence thou usest to thyself, the greater shall be thy growth [i. 25].

For all his rigour Thomas was very tender and gentle in his counsel to the weak. He knew that we must be very patient with ourselves, if we are

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to make progress, and the progress must be often very slow. He must have been an ideal novice-master. He is so considerate and so wise in his hopefulness.

If thou canst not continually recollect thyself, yet do it sometimes and at the least once a day [i. 19]. —If thou canst not contemplate high and heavenly things, rest in the Passion of Christ and dwell gladly in His sacred wounds [ii. 1].—Deal not roughly with him that is tempted, but give him comfort, as thou wouldst wish to be done to thyself [i. 13].—Do what lies in thee and do it diligently [iii. 12].

Behind all the simplicity of his words there lies a majestic conception of God as the Creator of all human happiness, the ever-present Source of all human activity, the theme of man's adoring meditation, the goal and glory of his life. It is this penetrating sense of God's Presence which gives to *The Imitation of Christ* its vitalising and converting power. It is touched with the dignity of God's nearness. It breathes the atmosphere of the tender love of God. It suggests the still whisper of the Voice of God calling us to Himself, that in Him we may have peace.

If thy heart were right, then every creature would be a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so small and abject, but it reflects the goodness of God [ii. 4].—Let nothing be great unto thee, nothing high, nothing pleasing,

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nothing acceptable, but simply God or that which is of God [ii. 5].—If thou seekest Jesus in all things, thou shalt surely find Jesus [ii. 7].—When the grace of God comes to a man, then he is made able for all things [ii. 8].—Thou art the end of all good, the height of life, the depth of all that can be spoken, and to hope in Thee above all things is the strongest comfort of Thy servants [iv. 59].

Again and again as we take up the book, its words come to us with a message of renewal, kindling us to new hopes, stirring higher ideals, touching new depths of spiritual sense, and revealing new capacities of love and service in the imitation of Christ. It is this spirit of hope and renewal, this frank and confident return to God, this glory in the Cross of Christ, which we need to-day. Well may we make our own such words as these, which come to us laden with the ripe experience of a saint who through many tribulations has entered into the kingdom of God: "Daily ought we to renew our purpose and stir up ourselves to fervour, as though this were the first day of our conversion, and say, Help me Lord God in a good purpose and in Thy holy service, and grant that I may now this day begin perfectly, for that which I have done hitherto is nothing."

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IV

LORENZO SCUPOLI AND "THE SPIRITUAL COMBAT"

BETWEEN the days of Thomas a Kempis and Lorenzo Scupoli had come the great upheaval of the Reformation, which had left its mark on every country in Europe. The years that had passed since the death of Thomas a Kempis had changed the direction of religious thought in ways which few had foreseen. The Middle Ages had passed away. A new world was emerging, with new problems and new aims. *The Imitation of Christ* breathed a spirit of tranquillity and peace in all its pages. *The Spiritual Combat* presents, as its name implies, a picture of struggle and conflict. The Mystics had done their quiet work of preparation and had opened a door of vision into heaven. Now the power of that vision is tested by the practical demands of a life lived in the strenuous activities of a world not yet won to holiness nor swayed by ideals of goodness and of truth. New careers have opened for the educated classes besides those of the knight and the monk, which were all that the

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Middle Ages offered. This active and busy life in the world needed guidance and direction in the ways of spiritual growth. Deliberate and definite instruction in the details of a disciplined and ordered life of the spirit takes the place of the old scholastic epitome of doctrine and the ecstatic outpourings of the mystic and the seer. Julian and Thomas a Kempis reveal the great principles of faith and vision which guide the soul upon the upward path of union with God. Scupoli deals with the actual difficulties of a soul beset with temptations and struggling with the deceitfulness of sin. Not only has the demand for holiness of life among Christians become more general and more insistent, but the individual conscience, which the spirit of the age has freed from many of its accustomed obediences and sanctions, needs special guidance. Scupoli and the writers of the Spanish school of the sixteenth century apply the deepest experience of the spiritual life, which has been gained through years of monastic discipline, to the new needs of those who living in the world are yet anxious to prove that their citizenship is in heaven. It is this which makes *The Spiritual Combat* so real and so useful to us to-day. The conditions of those for whom it was first written are reproduced in our own lives. We find that our own needs are exactly disclosed and our own difficulties graphically portrayed by this wise counsellor of the sixteenth century.

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A.

Scupoli was born in 1529 and he died in 1610. His life was therefore passed in that most confused and turbulent period of European history, when the first fury of the Reformation movement was spending itself in violent and impetuous reaction. Twelve years before Scupoli was born Martin Luther had nailed his theses to the door of Wittenberg Church, and had begun that movement of individualism, heralded already by Wycliffe and Huss, which was soon to question all the established principles of Church authority and organisation. The Church was reaping what it had sown. It was the scandalous immorality, the rapacious greed, the unspiritual temper of the Church of the fifteenth century, which eventually gave permanence to a movement of revolt, in itself not more dangerous nor difficult than many other perils of dissent which had only proved temporary and ineffectual. Had it been possible for Luther to meet with sympathetic counsel and guidance at the hands of spiritual men, whose lives could have been an epiphany of Christian holiness and grace, the whole movement which he inaugurated might have ended gloriously in strengthening and purifying the Church, and in reasserting those primitive ideals of early Christian life and teaching, from which it had partly strayed. But from the first, politics had intervened to confuse

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the issue, and Luther was led to break away in violent schism from the established order of the Church, and to create that breach of Catholic unity which up to this very day has wrought untold harm in the life of Christendom.

It was in the very year in which Scupoli was born, 1529, that the Diet of Speier was held, at which the minority of the reforming princes of Germany made formal protest against the decision of the Diet, which had declared against any innovation in the discipline, sacraments, and government of the Catholic Church. It was this protest at the Diet of Speier which won for the German reformers the name " protestant "—a title destined by its frequent misuse in relation to the Church of England to do grave injury to the cause of Catholic reunion and progress, by obscuring the essential catholicity of a Church, which through all its movements of reform had never suffered any breach in the historic continuity of its apostolic ministry, as all the reforming bodies on the Continent had invariably done.

The vital elements of success and spiritual power in the movement of Reform were the insistence upon holiness of life, and the assertion of the responsibility of the individual to develop to the full all his personal gifts in the furtherance of the glory of God. But these were powers which could be developed and exercised most effectively in the sacramental fellowship of the Catholic Church. It might well be that

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abuses and scandals of long standing in the government and ecclesiastical policy of the Papal Court could not readily be remedied or removed. But personal holiness need not wait upon papal method. Of the three great and imperative needs of the moment—spiritual renewal, instruction in the great verities of the Christian Faith, and reform of the Papal Court—the first two could well be considered by themselves.

It was the recognition of this which led some of the most spiritually minded of the Italian clergy in 1523 to form the Oratory of Divine Love. Caraffa was the leader of this movement of spiritual reform within the Church. It was an informal society of about fifty priests of high social position, who wished to turn to religious use, in furtherance of the highest life of the Church, the best inspiration and thought of the New Learning. In the succeeding year, as the first outcome of this new effort, Caraffa founded a definite religious Order, called the Theatines—after the name of the see Theate, which he had given up in order to pursue without hindrance this work of spiritual reform. The work of the Theatine Order was to inaugurate a spiritual revival in the lives of the parish clergy. They were undisciplined, they were unspiritual, they were ignorant. The Theatines, by their own lives of discipline, by their own ideals of devotion, and their definite teaching of the Faith, were to bring new life and light and love into the

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sacramental ministries of the Church, which had been robbed of all attractiveness and power through the moral laxity and ignorance of the clergy. The new movements of heresy found their strength in popular ignorance of the Faith and in the abuses of clerical life. It was the parish priest who was most in touch with the daily life of the people. It was there that true reform must begin. The Theatines were therefore themselves an association of secular priests, bound by the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and trained to bring the light of spiritual counsel and the inspiration of holiness and of instructed faith to the help of their brethren in the midst of their parochial work. It was to the Theatine Order that Lorenzo Scupoli attached himself in 1569.

This movement of Catholic reform showed itself in the sixteenth century in the establishment of many new religious Orders, such as the Oratorians, the Capuchins, and the Barnabites, and in the activities of many saintly lives. Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Francis de Sales, Carlo Borromeo, Teresa, Vincent de Paul, are names which recall ministries of abundant fruitfulness in many varied fields of practical service which signalise the revival of holiness within the Church. A new spirit of zeal was aroused by the very vigour of the Protestant assault upon its Sacraments and its Faith. That spirit of ardent championship of the cause of the

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Church found its most striking illustration in the foundation of the Jesuit Order, which in its fearless zeal, its devotion to the Faith, its deep knowledge of human character, and its missionary enthusiasm, possessed striking resemblances to the Order of the Theatines, in which Scupoli exercised his spiritual ministry.

Scupoli lived to see much of the fruit of all these efforts after spiritual reform. He saw indeed purity and holiness once more the normal expression of the priestly life; he saw many that had been led into error brought back to the faith of the Church through the careful and zealous preaching of the truth; but he saw no approach to reunion between the great bodies of dissent and the Catholic Church. The breach had been allowed to grow wider and wider. The Council of Trent made no attempt to reconcile the revolted children of the Church. It made reunion more difficult still, by formulating with much more careful definition the very doctrines of the mediaeval Church which had inspired the movement of dissent, and by inaugurating a new attitude in the Papacy itself of intolerant and unyielding opposition. Strong in its sense of recovered holiness, the Church of Rome started forth upon a new campaign of conquest, having learned nothing of penitence, nothing of tolerance, nothing of sympathy from its falls, having gained no wider outlook nor truer conception of primitive Catholicity from

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all the rich treasures of the past which the New Learning had unlocked.

The lesson of Scupoli had not been fully learned. It must indeed be to a generation deeply imbued with that stern spirit of self-conquest, that confident trust in God and unselfish passion for His glory, which Scupoli reveals, that we must look for such a growth of penitence and holiness, for such an awed devotion to the majestic Will of God, as shall create a spiritual atmosphere in which the unquenchable hopes of Catholic reunion may be at length fulfilled.

B.

Were it not for his book the story of Scupoli's life would be entirely unknown to us. The few details that we know are due to those who were drawn to inquire about the author of *The Spiritual Combat*, because it revealed to them the wise insight and ardent zeal of a true man of God. Francesco Scupoli was born at Otranto in 1529. He was of noble family, and from his earliest days showed a great devotion to study. At the age of forty he entered the house of the Theatine Order at Naples, and took the name of Lorenzo. After two years he was professed, and six years later, at the age of forty-eight, he was ordained to the Priesthood at Piacenza. He had chosen an Order which was peculiarly suited

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to his genius. His intuitive insight into character, his love of devotion, his deep humility, his persuasive eloquence and attractive skill in teaching, his practical knowledge of affairs, and his undaunted courage, gave him unusual opportunities of usefulness in the exercise of his priestly ministry. The spiritual poverty of the great Italian cities provided ample scope for energies such as his. In the very midst of his devoted and unselfish work, at Genoa in 1585, Scupoli found himself the victim of a foul and baseless slander, which accused him of conduct unworthy of the priesthood. The actual terms of the accusation are unknown, as the Theatine Order was accustomed to destroy the records of all such trials. Some speak of it as a grave lapse from the Faith, others regard it as a charge of sensual sin. Both seem equally improbable, but as he was unable to find a witness to refute the calumny, the rigid rule of the Order prevailed, and Scupoli was sentenced to degradation from the priesthood. Accepting the severe decree of punishment with humility, Scupoli remained still in the ranks of the Order, continuing his religious life as a lay-brother both at Venice and at Padua.

Despite the ignominy of his punishment, Scupoli retained the trust and affection of those who still came to him for counsel and spiritual conference. It was in this hour of his humiliation that he gave himself to the writing of *The Spiritual Combat*, in

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which he made the ripe experience of his own spiritual life available for the help and guidance of others in their conflict with evil. The first edition of Scupoli's book was published at Venice four years after his retirement from the priestly life. It appeared anonymously. Francis de Sales received a copy of the book in the same year at Padua from the hands of a Theatine, who was very probably Scupoli himself. Francis found the little book of the deepest value as a guide to holiness. He carried it about with him always in his pocket, reading in it daily and recommending it to his penitents. It became the inspiration of his own *Introduction to the Devout Life.*

For twenty-five years Lorenzo Scupoli lived on in solitude and humiliation, making full proof of his lay-ministry by his spiritual counsel, his brilliant advocacy of the Faith, his continued instruction of those who sought his teaching, and his devotional writings, in which he laid bare the secrets of his own spiritual experience for the help and guidance of others. In the year 1610, at the advanced age of eighty, Scupoli died at Naples in the Theatine house of S. Paolo, in which he had first taken his vows.

The Spiritual Combat is the revelation of the deepest secrets of his own struggle towards perfection. It is the work of one who realised most vividly the strength of the powers of evil and the

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necessity of a stern and continuous conflict to secure victory. It is marked by a spirit of thoroughness and glowing zeal, which recalls the fervent ardour of the heroes of the Spanish Church. The same insistence on the power of the human will in the life of devotion, which marked the works of Rodriguez and *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, characterises also *The Spiritual Combat.* Written not in Latin, but in the vernacular Italian, the book is significant of that new appeal to the awakened sense of individual responsibility, which the spirit of the age had so sedulously fostered. It deals with the practical difficulties of the busy man of affairs. Francis de Sales praised it because it was practical, clear, and methodical. He read it himself again and again, and always with fresh profit. It showed a remarkable insight into spiritual difficulties, and offered definite instructions—a deliberate plan of campaign—for the struggle against the most insidious and most habitual temptations. Based upon the simple acceptance of the teaching and sacramental life of the Church, Scupoli shows how the resources of Divine succour may be applied by the human will to the daily conquest over evil and the gradual attainment of Christian Perfection. Its counsels are as true and as helpful to-day as they were for the difficult age in which they were written, and many who perhaps may be denied the opportunity of wise spiritual counsel to-day from

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the lips of some faithful and loving priest of God, may find abundant help, clear and skilful direction, and hopeful encouragement from the prayerful study of *The Spiritual Combat*, in which the priestly heart of Lorenzo Scupoli reveals the deep secrets of his own self-conquest and of his self-devoted submission to the victorious Will of God.

C.

There is a method in *The Spiritual Combat* which makes it very easy to understand. Scupoli had arrived at a certainty and conviction about the essential conditions of success in the Christian warfare, which made it possible for him to speak in terms of unequivocal assurance about the detailed order and the progress of the campaign against sin. He dedicated his work to "the Supreme Captain and most glorious Conqueror Jesus Christ the Son of Mary," scorning any less glorious dedication. "How can I, without shame and without loss, dedicate it to any other than to Thy Majesty, the King of heaven and earth? As to what this treatise teaches, it is all Thy teaching, since Thou hast taught us that, distrustful of ourselves, we should trust in Thee, fight and pray. Thine, O Lord, is this *Combat* in all its parts, because Thine is the teaching, and Thine are all the spiritual soldiers,

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among whom are we the regular clergy of the Theatines."

The natural aim of the Christian life must be Perfection. True wisdom lies in knowing wherein perfection consists. It is not found in ascetic rigour, nor in many prayers, nor in solitude, nor in discipline, nor in ecstasy, nor in any outward activity, but in living for the glory of God.

It does not consist in anything else than in the knowledge of the goodness and greatness of God and of our own nothingness and inclination to every evil, in His love and in the hatred of ourselves, in subjection not only to Him, but for love of Him to every creature, in the renunciation of all will of our own and a complete resignation of ourselves to His good pleasure. And further than this, that all this should be willed and done by us simply for the glory of God and for His pleasure alone, and because He thus wills and merits to be loved and served [i.].

If this is the height of perfection to which we aspire, then we must be ready " to do continual violence " to ourselves and to " undertake a continual and very sharp conflict," providing ourselves " with four things, as the surest and most necessary arms, distrust of ourselves, trust in God, practice, and prayer."

Distrust of self is very deliberately chosen as the first step in the spiritual combat. It is to be

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sought as the special gift of God, and is the lesson of all our falls.

Distrust of yourself is so necessary to you in this combat, that without it you will not be able to overcome even the very smallest of your little passions [ii.].—Ask it of the Lord Himself with fervent and humble prayers, since it is His gift [ii.].—When you fall, hasten at once in thought to a humble recognition of yourself, and with earnest prayer ask the Lord that He will give you the true light of self-knowledge and a complete distrust of yourself, unless you wish to fall again and sometimes, it may be, into more serious ruin [ii.].—This is the foundation of all other virtues. God, before we existed, created us out of nothing, and now that we exist through Him wishes to base all the spiritual structure on this knowledge of ourselves, that we of ourselves are nothing. And the deeper we sink ourselves in that foundation, the higher will this structure rise. And in proportion as we dig out the earth of our wretchedness, so much more firmly will the divine architect lay the stones that He may advance the building [xxxii.].

Upon distrust in self there follows a real trust in God. It is this which assures success and realises the effective power of the Divine help in human difficulties. The sense of the omnipotence of God gives courage and stability to all our own endeavours, and the remembrance of God's readiness to help prevents despair in the midst of the gravest disquietude. He who fights valiantly, trusting in God,

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will not " lose the help which never fails those who fight for Him, though He sometimes permits them to be wounded." This complete and absolute trust in God is tested by the attitude of the soul after repeated falls. Nowhere are the insight and faith of Scupoli so wonderfully revealed as in his counsel to those who seek peace after successive defeats in the spiritual combat.

When you find yourself wounded, from having fallen into some sin through your weakness, or even at times through wilfulness or evil intention, do not be a coward, and do not be disquieted by it, but turning yourself at once to God, say—" Behold, my Lord, what I have done of my own self, nor canst Thou expect from me anything but such falls into sin." And here after a little delay debase yourself in your own eyes, grieve at the offence you have given to the Lord, and without confusion to yourself, be angry with your vicious passions, and chiefly with that which has caused your fall. Then go on to say, " Not here, O Lord, should I have stopped, if Thou by Thy goodness had not held me." Then give Him thanks and love Him more than ever, wondering at His great mercy in that He, though offended by you, yet stretches forth His right hand that you may not fall again. Lastly, you will say, with great confidence in His infinite mercy, " Do Thou, O Lord, according to Thy will, forgive me, grant that I may never live apart from Thee or afar off, and that I may not offend Thee any more." And, this done, do not spend your time in thinking whether God has forgiven you or not, because this is nothing else but pride, disquietude of mind,

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loss of time, and a snare of the devil, under colour of various pretexts, which are good. Therefore leaving yourself freely in the tender hands of God, follow up your own practice as if you had not fallen. The method of recovering this peace is that you should for the time wholly forget your fall and give yourself to the consideration of the ineffable goodness of God. Then in the time of sacramental confession, which I exhort you to use frequently, go over all your faults, and with renewed sorrow and displeasure at the offence you have given God, and with a resolution not to offend Him any more, you will unfold them sincerely to your spiritual father [xxvi.].

Trust in God leads to the due exercise of both the understanding and the will, which are the two chief weapons with which we wage our conflict. The understanding must be prayerfully placed under the illumination of the Holy Ghost, and success depends on eliminating the two distracting and distorting influences of inordinate affection and of curiosity. Intellectual pride is the great snare of the understanding, and "pride of the understanding is more dangerous than the pride of the will."

The first and most important way of obtaining light for the understanding is prayer, praying the Holy Spirit that He will deign to shed this light upon our hearts. The other way is the continual practice of a deep and loyal consideration of things, to see whether they be good or bad, according as the Holy Spirit teaches, and not as they appear outwardly.—A humble knowledge of ourselves ought

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to be prized more highly than the highest attained of all the sciences [vii.].—Take care as much as possible always to keep your will purified and free from inordinate affection of any kind [viii.].—In the desire of knowing the things of heaven, you must be sober and humble, not wishing to know anything but Christ crucified, His life and death, and as much as He asks of you [ix.].

It is in his rousing call to a generous exercise of the will that Scupoli reveals the intensity of the continuous effort which the spiritual combat makes upon the highest energies of our personal life. Here he is at one with Augustine and Thomas a Kempis and Ignatius, and all the great moral teachers, who have sought to regenerate human life. The will must be directed to one sole end—the glory of God. We must will and do all as if we were moved by God, and with the simple intention of honouring and satisfying Him alone. And because this necessitates continual effort, we must be careful to renew the will again and again. Motives so soon change. That which has been begun for God's glory is often continued solely for our own pleasure and self-gratification. The proof of the readiness of the will to persevere is found in the conquest of the smaller sins, and in the renunciation of the little faults as well as of the great ones. It is the work of the alert and eager will to choose definitely against which foe the battle shall be immediately waged.

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The fight can never be relaxed. It is a daily struggle, under the leadership of our victorious Captain, Christ Jesus. And that foe must be chosen for battle, which actually at the time and at close quarters is making war against us. Against that one enemy we must fling the whole force of our attack, in full confidence that by the help of God we are stronger than our foe. Such confidence in the superior power of God arms the will with courage and is the promise of victory. Only in the case of temptations of the flesh is flight the way of safety. "You must not fight in face of the vice, but flee with all your might any occasion and person whatsoever whereby you may fall into the least danger." Meditation on the Life and Passion of the Crucified Lord is the real remedy against such sins.

Let your will, being moved and drawn by His Will, lay itself out to will it as being willed by God and willed for His good pleasure and honour alone [x.].—To determine your will with greater ease to will in all things the good pleasure of God and His honour, remember again and again that He has first of all in many ways honoured you and loved you. Every hour, even every moment, He keeps you safe from your enemies, fights for you with His grace, continually holds His beloved Son ready to be your defence and sustenance in the Sacrament of the Altar, is not this a sign of the inestimable consideration and love which the Infinite God bears towards you? Above everything, keep always in your memory that the Majesty of God of itself is infinitely worthy of being

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honoured and served, simply for His own good pleasure [xi.].—Let no one presume to think that he is able to follow the true Christian virtues, and to serve God as is fitting, unless he wish really to do violence to Himself and to bear the pain which is felt in renouncing not only the greater but also the little faults to which he has been attached by earthly affection [xii.].—The habits of evangelical virtue are acquired by doing over and over again acts agreeable to the Divine Will [xiii.].—God has endowed our will with such freedom and strength, that if all the senses, with all the devils and the world together were to arm themselves and unite against it, fighting against it and pressing it with all their effort, yet in spite of these it can with the greatest freedom will and not will all that it wishes or does not wish, and as often, and as long, and in the way and to the end it most desires [xiv.].—Let the order of battle and your practice be to make war against those passions which have always done you harm, and are most frequently assaulting you and harming you, and to adorn yourself as perfectly as you can with the virtues which are contrary to them [xxxiii.].

Scupoli is very wise in his knowledge of the difficulties which beset our rules and resolutions, and the eagerness of the soul to see the marks of its own progress. Rules are not made for themselves, nor ought they to press heavily upon our attention. They are meant to make the vision of God more perpetual. Where a long task is set before us, it is well not to think of the whole at once, but to concentrate attention and effort on the beginning, and

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to fight as if that were all. Thus we are insensibly led on to the fulfilment of the whole. In the time of spiritual delight, special humility is needed in making resolutions and promises, that we do not overstrain our powers.

I have not given you these methods of ruling the senses that you may occupy yourself with these, for you ought, as it were, to be always united in your mind to the Lord. There is little fruit when many practices are undertaken, however good they may be in themselves. Indeed, they are very often merely a perplexity of mind, self-love, inconstancy, and the snares of the devil [xxiii.].—The practice you have in hand may perchance require many and many an act to gain one virtue and incessant weariness for many days, and the enemies to be taken by force may appear to you to be many and great. Begin these acts as if there were only a few, and you had need of toiling for only a few days, and fight against one enemy as if there were no others to fight, with full confidence that by the help of God you are stronger than they are. For if you act in this way, sloth will begin to lose its force and will then make way for the gradual entrance of the opposite virtue.—When it happens that you have need of doing things, about which, since they appear to you in your sloth to be many and difficult, you begin to be weary, begin, nevertheless, bravely and quietly with one, as if there were not another to do. For by doing this diligently, you will come to do all with far less fatigue than that which in your sloth seemed to be before you [xx.].—In the time of spiritual delight be very cautious and humble in

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your resolutions, particularly in promises and vows [xxix.].

The fourth weapon in the spiritual combat is Prayer. Prayer places a sword in the hand of God, so that He will fight and conquer for us. And with our petitions there are needed both self-discipline and thanksgiving. Scupoli insists very earnestly on the important part which thanksgiving plays in the Christian conflict. By calling to mind the mercies of God, the will is strengthened, and new faith is aroused by a remembrance of the Divine power and loving-kindness. Mental prayer is a lifting up of the mind to God with an actual or virtual request for that which is desired. Meditation is an integral part of the life of prayer, and of all subjects of meditation the Passion of Christ is the most fruitful and the most inexhaustible.

Beyond these four weapons—Distrust in self, Trust in God, Exercise of both understanding and will, and Prayer—far surpassing them all in power and dignity, is the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. In speaking of the Holy Eucharist as a means of victory in the spiritual combat, Scupoli emphasises the need of humble preparation, the recognition of God's joy in dwelling with us, the infinite love of God which the sacrament displays, and the confidence with which we must give Him a large place in our heart, that He may make Himself wholly

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master of it. The Holy Eucharist is not an occasional weapon only, but one that may be frequently used. "Because this most Holy Sacrament and this weapon can be practised and taken in two ways, sacramentally once a day, and spiritually every hour and every moment, you ought not to neglect to take it very frequently in the second way, and always in the first way when it is allowed you."

So we are amply equipped for the spiritual combat, from which there is no discharge in this life, and in which we must never lose courage. If we fight on bravely and are faithful unto death, it will be by the gracious mercy and help of God our Captain and most glorious Conqueror. In His power we conquer, and His will be the victory. This is the supreme confidence, born of a long experience of painful conflict and humiliation, which Scupoli hands on to each soldier of Christ, as he takes his place in the army of God and sets himself boldly to the fight. The aged warrior writes, as God has revealed to him the secret of the battlefield. He can but speak as God has dealt with him. His words cannot take the place of God's own revelation to each individual soul, but they can point each warrior to the Source of Victory and lead him to the Cross of the supreme Captain and most glorious Conqueror, Jesus Christ. For, as he beautifully says, unveiling the secret of his own steadfastness and faith, "This crucified Lord is the book that I give you to read,

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from which you will be able to draw the true portrait of every virtue. For being the book of life, not only does it teach the intellect by word, but it inflames the will by a living example. The whole world is full of books, and yet all of them together are not able to teach you the way of acquiring all the virtues so perfectly as we can acquire them by gazing on the crucified God."

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V

FRANCIS DE SALES AND "AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE"

FRANCIS DE SALES is perhaps the best known amongst the teachers and writers on devotion, whose lives of holiness and religious activity marked the renewal of Church-life after the Council of Trent. His work as a Missioner in the district of Chablais shows the way in which a faithful and courageous preaching of the Catholic Faith was able to triumph even in the face of the grave political opposition which the adherents of the Protestant reforming bodies were able to offer. His treatises on Devotion reveal an intimate knowledge of the social life of the cultured classes of his day, and disclose the way in which he sought to arouse new spiritual ideals in the hearts of those whose duties called them to take an active share in public life. The experience of the cloister, which had stood the test of many generations, was made available for the consecration of the lives of those who were engrossed in the manifold responsibilities of active life in the world. Of all the books that had hitherto been written, none had

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shown such a delicate appreciation and such a practical knowledge of the possibilities of devotion in the lives of those, " who live in town, at home, in court, who by their position are obliged to live to all outward appearance an ordinary life, and who often, under the pretext of pretended impossibility, do not even wish to think of undertaking the devout life."

That is what makes *An Introduction to the Devout Life* so valuable to us to-day. The conditions of those whom Francis de Sales specially designed to instruct, are in all essentials exactly the same as our own, and his advice is peculiarly adapted to meet the needs of our own experience. His Metropolitan, the Archbishop of Vienne, was voicing the gratitude of a long posterity when he thanked Francis de Sales for " the inestimable advantage which will accrue to those who shall be happy enough to read this book as it ought to be read."

A.

Francis de Sales was born in 1567, and he died in 1622. The period of his activity therefore covers the years when Europe was still convulsed by the Wars of Religion, which were the first heritage of the Reformation. In every European state the chief political issues were determined by the conflict between the aggressive leaders of Protestantism and

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the defenders of the Catholic Faith. The Papacy, emerging more powerful from the vindication of its holiness at the Council of Trent, sought to regain what it had lost, partly by a systematic propagation of the Faith, partly by a policy of stern repression, in both of which endeavours it received the powerful aid of the newly established Order of the Jesuits. It was the age of the Armada, of the unification of France under the astute rule of Henri Quatre. Spain was using its growing power to champion the cause of the Papacy, while Germany, torn and rent by rival religious factions, was fast losing its prestige as a European power under the unstable rule of Rudolf II.

But the country with which Francis de Sales was most closely associated was the district round Geneva, which had been in the possession of the House of Savoy. The story of the Reformation in Switzerland illustrates very vividly the way in which political issues had become inseparably bound up with ecclesiastical reform. The course of the Reforming movement in Switzerland had been determined by the influence of Zwingli, who, in contrast to Luther with his religious passion and aristocratic sympathies, was a cold thinker and a genuine republican. The triumph of Zwingli at Zurich in 1523 meant the withdrawal of the city from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Constance and the proscription of all Catholic worship. Simi-

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larly the institution of republican government at Berne and at Basle, under the influence of the reformers, had driven the Bishops into exile. With the assistance of Berne, Geneva in 1536 successfully revolted from the Dukedom of Savoy, and five years later the republic accepted the tyrannical discipline of Calvin. From that time until Calvin's death in 1564, Geneva became the centre of Calvinist influence and was lost to the Catholic cause. But bitter dissensions which arose between the supporters of Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin, combined with the energetic movement of the Counter-reformation, to pave the way for a reaction, and the work of conversion which was begun by Carlo Borromeo, the saintly Archbishop of Milan, was carried on by Francis de Sales in his mission to the Chablais from 1593 to 1598, in which he persevered through all dangers till he had overcome the most violent Protestant opposition and reconciled even the reformed ministers to the Church. But the possibility of this mission work depended entirely on favourable political conditions. The acceptance of the Catholic Faith by Henry IV. in 1593, and his absolution by the Pope in 1595, had facilitated the work of Francis, but it was the recovery of the Chablais, the Genevois, and the country of Gex by the Duke of Savoy which had made the mission at all possible. Geneva itself remained still independent. In 1602 Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, made his famous attempt

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to regain the city by surprise, which was foiled by the indomitable courage of its citizens. Geneva therefore remained obdurate to the appeals of Francis. It was the great tragedy of his life, that though consecrated titular Bishop of Geneva, he was never received in his own see-city, nor permitted to minister at the Altar of his own Cathedral.

The seventeenth century opened with happy auguries for the work of the Church in such beneficent and saintly activities as those of Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul in France, and Teresa in Spain. But into the religious differences which had arisen, such bitterness had been imported, and so inseparably had political and religious issues become entangled, that peaceful conversion was no longer possible; and in 1618 Europe was plunged into the fierce carnage and intolerable miseries of the Thirty Years' War, which postponed for more than a century that renewal of religion, of which the work of S. Francis de Sales was so hopeful an anticipation.

B.

Francis de Sales was born of noble family in 1567, at the Castle of Sales in the country of Savoy. He was the child of many prayers, dedicated by his mother, like Gregory Nazianzen, to the service of God. From his earliest childhood Francis revealed a most loving, gracious, and generous char-

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acter. He showed from the first a rare instinct of devotion, and as a boy he loved to gather the children of the village round him in church and teach them to honour the Altar and the Font. At the age of ten he received his First Communion, and was confirmed at Annecy, where he was at school. Already Francis had conceived a vocation to the priesthood and had begun to live a disciplined life, with a rule of prayer, study, and Church worship which he had drawn up for himself. His father had other hopes for the boy's future. Such a love of study, such gifts of attractiveness and power gave promise of a great career, and M. de Boisy hoped that his son would attain distinction in the profession of the law. To that end, at the early age of twelve, his father designed to send him to Paris to the College of Navarre, which was the favourite school of the nobility of Savoy. But Francis shrank from an education which was purely secular, and which exposed him to many temptations, and at his own request was allowed to enter the College at Claremont, where the newly established Order of the Jesuits had successfully inaugurated a system of education, which combined efficiency of secular teaching with a sound religious and moral training.

For six years Francis remained at Paris, an eager student, a devout worshipper, and an enthusiastic companion. His education was not confined to

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rhetoric and philosophy. He was trained in all the varied accomplishments essential to the life of a nobleman, to which he owed much both of his sympathy and his influence with the courtiers of his day. With his vocation to the priesthood becoming clearer and dearer to him day by day, he applied himself assiduously to theology, studying Hebrew, and especially the writings of the Fathers and of Thomas Aquinas. Towards the end of this period of college life at Paris, at the age of seventeen, Francis passed through an experience of spiritual desolation, which for six weeks harassed him with the fear of final damnation and eternal loss. The severity of this religious trial, which he never forgot, made him unusually tender and sympathetic in after years with all forms of spiritual temptation and doubt.

After his course at Paris his father, still nourishing the hope of a legal career for his son, sent Francis to the University of Padua in 1587. Padua offered unusual attractions, not only as a distinguished school of canon and civil law, but also as a famous seat of theological learning. Here Francis entered eagerly upon fresh theological studies under the guidance of his Jesuit director, and also gained his first insight into the conditions of Italian Church life, which was experiencing a renewal of activity under the zealous leadership of Pope Sixtus v. It was at Padua that Francis became acquainted with Lorenzo Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*. This book of

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devotion became his most treasured companion and his daily guide, helping largely to fashion his own spiritual life, and supplying him with the foundation upon which his own *Introduction to the Devout Life* was subsequently based.

Francis completed his education in Italy by visiting Rome, Loreto, Ancona, Venice, Verona, Milan, and Turin, a diligent lover of all their beauties and a worshipper at all their famous shrines. Returned to Savoy, he went to Annecy to visit Claude de Granier, the aged Bishop of Geneva, who quickly detected in Francis the promise of illustrious service in the cause of the Church. M. de Boisy still hoped that Francis would accept some of the secular preferments which were now offered to him. But not even the promise of a seat in the Senate could turn him from his determination to seek the priesthood. His father's consent was with difficulty won, even when the dignity of Provost of the Chapter of the Cathedral of Geneva was granted to him by the Pope in 1593. But he was at length convinced of his son's irrevocable vocation, and accepted the overthrow of his own long-cherished hopes with the words, "Do as the Lord bids you. It is not for me to resist His adorable Will." That very year Francis realised his highest ambition, and was ordained both deacon and priest by the Bishop of Geneva, who gladly welcomed to his aid one who was so exceptionally fitted, alike by holiness, by theological knowledge,

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and by personal charm, to commend the Faith of the Church to those who had wandered from the fold.

Geneva was still closed to the ministries of the Catholic Church. Francis de Sales therefore made his headquarters at Annecy, where he found ample scope for his priestly zeal both as Penitentiary and as Preacher. His sermons marked a new era in popular preaching. They were exquisitely simple, profoundly spiritual, and full of direct teaching. He realised that the errors of Calvinism could only be combated by frequent and simple repetition of the great truths of the Catholic Faith, enforced by the witness of a life of tireless Christian activity, of winning courtesy, and radiant holiness.

The gifts of Francis were those of an ideal Evangelist. And a worthy sphere for his mission labours was soon found in the Chablais district of Savoy, which had been lost to the Catholic Church since its conquest by the Calvinists of Berne in 1536. The acceptance of the Catholic Faith by Henry IV. of France in 1593 offered an opportunity for the restoration of the Catholic religion in Savoy. Thonon, on the south side of the Lake of Geneva, was chosen as the centre of the Mission, to which, after the failure of the first missioner, Francis de Sales offered to dedicate himself. For five years Francis laboured in the Mission with the utmost devotion, with heroic courage, and with indomitable patience.

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After three years of ceaseless preaching, of painstaking organisation and devoted self-sacrifice, he began to reap the first fruits of his apostolic labours. From that time the work continued with growing success, until by the autumn of 1598 the last Protestant ministers had either been reconciled or been forced to withdraw, and the Chablais was once more restored to the Catholic Church. The Mission had revealed the singular ascendancy which Francis de Sales could exercise over the hearts of men, through the irresistible power of his patient love, the winning eloquence of his glowing faith, and the steadfast witness of his personal devotion and unselfish service.

It was natural, after such a proof of his gifts, that Francis de Sales should be chosen by the Bishop of Geneva to be his Coadjutor in the difficult and often dangerous work of his diocese. With great reluctance Francis accepted the office, and after long delays was consecrated Coadjutor-Bishop in 1602. His new position took him on a mission to the Court of Henry IV. at Paris, where for the greater part of a year he exercised his care of souls with his wonted love and diligence. It was here that he gained a close insight into the details of Court life. To this experience was due the wise and practical nature of the counsel which he was able afterwards to give to those who sought his guidance in the spiritual life, and which ultimately took permanent form in his *Introduction to the Devout Life.*

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He gave himself untiringly to the work of his diocese, showing in all his episcopal duties that scrupulous attention to every detail, that pastoral sympathy and zealous care for souls, that spiritual insight and imperturbable patience, that simplicity, courtesy, and humility, which unvaryingly inspired all his ministerial work. His diocese lay partly in Savoy and partly in France, and his frequent preaching brought him into contact with an ever-growing number of men and women who sought him for their spiritual guide. While he was preaching the Lent course at Dijon in 1604, he made the acquaintance in this way of a widow, Madame de Chantal, whom he presently designed to be the first Superior of a new religious order, to be called the Order of the Visitation, which was meant to bring the sympathy and knowledge of cultured women, trained and disciplined in the spiritual life, to the help of the poor. It was a novel enterprise in that age to combine in this way the contemplative and the practical life in the rule of a religious order. Francis saw how needful it was to give definite and careful training to the spiritual life of those who were to be entrusted with the initiation of such a work, and the counsel which he gave to Madame de Chantal and her companions he presently gathered into the book which he published in 1608 under the title *An Introduction to the Devout Life.*

In 1610 his plans for the new Order were complete,

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and the Order of the Visitation was instituted at Annecy. The Sisters worked amongst the poor and visited the sick, tending them diligently in their own homes, while they observed a simple Rule of Devotion in their own community life. The need of such an Order was evidenced by the rapid increase of its Houses.

Another visit to Paris in 1618 extended his influence, and brought him into touch with Vincent de Paul and with Mère Angelique, the Abbess of Port-Royal. With Vincent de Paul Francis was in peculiar sympathy. Vincent's establishment of the Company of Mission Priests for the training and reform of the Clergy and for the preaching of Missions in country districts, fulfilled one of the dearest ideals of Francis de Sales, and his institution of the Sisters of Charity in 1634 was meant to satisfy a need very similar to that for which the Order of the Visitation had been created. Francis indeed chose Vincent de Paul as the Superior of his own Order of the Visitation in Paris.

This was the last visit of Francis to Paris, where he had exercised an abiding influence. In the autumn of 1622 illness warned him of approaching death, but he never spared himself, and up till the very end he continued his usual duties, abating nothing. His last counsel, given to the Sisters of the Visitation in the one brief word " Humility," sums up the lesson of his life. With the sacred name

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of Jesus upon his lips, Francis de Sales passed to his rest on Holy Innocents' Day, 1622, at the age of fifty-five.

Few men have ever left such a universal impression of holiness upon the minds of those amongst whom they lived. To the courtier, the peasant, the intolerant heretic, to the indifferent and the devout, the appeal of Francis de Sales was alike irresistible. He won the respect and affection of all by his transparent unselfishness, his trustful and loving courtesy, his unaffected simplicity and goodness. As the Calvinists themselves said, "If all the Bishops were like this one, we should soon be all Catholics." In an age which had been marked by clerical laxity and ignorance, Francis redeemed the Episcopate in the eyes of the world, and showed where the power of the Bishop really lay, in the punctual and loving fulfilment of his pastoral care of the Diocese. While he set himself to train the clergy and to place before them a more saintly ideal of holiness, he won the laity also to a higher standard of spiritual life, and brought the Word of God and the Sacraments into the lives of the workers and the peasants as well as into the homes of the cultured and the wealthy. He found little time amidst all his diocesan cares for writing books, but, in addition to his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he wrote a book on *The Love of God*, which revealed the secret of his own saintliness.

Both books are indeed disclosures of his own deep

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devotion and of the habits of his own religious life and thought. His was a life lived in conscious union with God. The source of his strength, his peace, and his untiring perseverance was the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Asked why he communicated so often, he would reply, "Our dear Lord is my Teacher in holiness, and I go continually to Him that I may learn His way. Learning without holiness will avail me little." Meditation and Prayer made the grace of his Communion effectual in his life. Indifferent alike to spiritual comfort or desolation, he lived calmly and worked happily in the power of the realised Presence of Jesus. To do God's Holy Will, to do it perfectly, to do it lovingly—this was the inspiration of his abundant service. The work which he had begun in the life of the Church of the seventeenth century was soon hindered and undone by the confusion of the Thirty Years' War, but Francis de Sales has left to us the story of a life which, through all the ages of the Church, will never cease to be a saintly pattern of ministerial service and a compelling witness to the happiness and beauty of the devout life.

C.

The charm of *An Introduction to the Devout Life* is its adaptability to the actual needs and conditions of those who are living ordinary lives of daily busi-

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ness and activity in the world. It is written not only with a marvellous insight into character and a profound theological knowledge, but with a wealth of illustration from natural history and from sacred biography, which makes it very attractive to those who have made no special study of devotion. Much of the book is derived from the actual letters of spiritual counsel which he had written to such friends as Madame de Chantal and Madame de Charmoisy. It had already stood the test of experience before it was given to the world in 1608. Francis de Sales makes every tender allowance for the beginner in the spiritual life, and for those who are hindered by special difficulties of any kind. All that he demands of those who seek the devout life is reality of purpose, sincerity of heart, and earnest effort.

There are many points in which Francis is directly indebted to Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*, which had so profoundly influenced his own religious life. But the general method of Francis is very different from that of Scupoli. Life is not presented as a supreme military exercise, devotion does not bear the same aspect of repression and struggle that it does with Scupoli. Francis enters into the details of daily work and discusses the various relations of family life in a way which is foreign to *The Spiritual Combat*. Life is rather the opportunity of developing latent faculties aright, and presenting to God the fulness

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of a manhood made perfect in all its varied opportunities of service and obedience to the Divine Will. Francis writes more discursively and introduces illustrations, often very vivid and arresting, drawn from facts of natural history and from the biographies of the saints, which afford ample evidence of his wide reading and make a ready appeal to the ordinary reader, but little trained in the reading of works of devotion. In common with the writings of all the masters of the spiritual life, the book shows a careful knowledge of the Bible story and a loving appreciation of the hidden treasures of the Word of God.

Francis begins with a definition of Devotion, which he defines shortly as "nothing else but a true love of God," that is a love which shows itself in active and prompt beneficence. To be good, a man must have charity, but to be devout he must have, in addition to charity, a great vivacity and promptitude in the works of charity. Devotion is needed in all states and conditions of life, because "devotion spoils nothing when it is true, but perfects all things." Francis had knowledge of almost all the books of devotion which the teachers of Spain especially had produced, such as Teresa's *Way of Perfection*, Avila's *Audi filia*, Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, Granada's *Guide for Sinners*.

Out of all these he chooses these words of Avila, as "the counsel of counsels," with which to start

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upon the way of devotion. "Whatever you look for, you will never find the Will of God so certainly as by the way of that lowly obedience, which is so much commended and practised by all the devout men of old."

The first work is the purgation of the soul. But after all, that is really the work of a lifetime, and we must not be discouraged at imperfections.

How sad it is to see souls, when they find that they are subject to many imperfections after having practised devotion for some time, begin to be anxious and disconcerted and discouraged, almost allowing their heart to be carried away with the temptation of giving up everything and going back on the old way.—Let us not be at all disconcerted by our imperfections, for our perfection consists in fighting them, and we should not know how to fight them without seeing them, or how to conquer them without meeting them. Our victory does not lie in our not feeling them, but in our not consenting to them.—It is a happy condition for us in this war, that we are always conquerors, provided that we are willing to fight [i. 4].

Francis urges the necessity of a real and sincere purpose to put away all sin as the first step in the devout life. Confession must be made with full preparation of contrition and resolute will to put away, to hate, and to avoid all occasion of sin. There must be left no tacit desire for sin. There are those who "would like to be able to sin with-

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out being damned." And when confession is made we must say everything simply and openly, and satisfy our conscience in that once for all. This is so important that Francis suggests a long and solemn declaration which should be engraved on the Soul at the moment of Forgiveness, in which a resolution of new life and trustful obedience is promised in these words :—

Turning myself to God Who is gentle and pitiful, I desire, propose, determine, and resolve irrevocably to serve Him and love Him now and for evermore, giving Him my spirit for this end, dedicating and consecrating it with all its faculties, my soul with all its powers, my heart with all its affections, my body with all its senses, declaring that I will never more abuse any part of my being against His Divine Will and Sovereign Majesty, to whom I sacrifice and offer myself in spirit, to be for ever a loyal, obedient, and faithful creature to Him, without ever wishing to draw back or repent of my resolution. But alas, if by the suggestion of the enemy, or by any human infirmity, it should happen that I should break in anything this my resolution and consecration, I declare from this day forth, and propose, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to recover myself as soon as I perceive my fall, turning myself anew to the Divine mercy without any delay or hesitation whatever. This is my will, my intention, my inviolable and irrevocable resolution, which I avow and confirm without reserve or exception, in the sacred presence of my God, in sight of the Church triumphant, and in face of the Church militant, my mother, who hears this my declaration in the

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person of him who as her officer hears me in this action [i. 20].

There is a thoroughness and solemnity about this declaration which is characteristic of Francis de Sales' continual realisation of the majesty of God and of His demand for man's complete and fully willed obedience. If a beginning is to be made at all, it is worth while that it should be thorough. And there is no one who need despair of the possibility of a new beginning, for "there is no temper so stubborn that may not by the grace of God in the first place, and then by industry and diligence, be subdued and overcome."

In this purgation of the soul Prayer takes its part, for "Prayer by setting our understanding in the brightness of Divine light, and exposing our will to the warmth of heavenly love, is able more than anything else to cleanse our understanding of its ignorance and our will of its corrupt affections." And the Prayer which Francis specially commends is the prayer of meditation. "Above all I counsel the practice of mental prayer, the prayer of the heart, and particularly that which concerns itself with the Life and Passion of our Lord. By gazing on Him frequently in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with Him, you will learn His ways, and will form your actions on the model of His." Speaking from the experience of his own invariable habit,

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he lays great stress upon the necessity of daily Meditation for the renewal of the spiritual life and for the frequent recollection of the Presence of God. He advises that the Meditation be made early in the day and in church if it be possible. " Begin all kinds of prayer, whether mental or vocal, in the presence of God, and keep this rule without exception." He suggests a simple way by which the imagination may be used to picture the scene and reproduce the details of the sacred story, and shows how the understanding may then take its part in " stirring up our affections in God and things divine." But he is most emphatic on the right approach to meditation and the right conclusion to it, and very careful to urge the need of patience with ourselves in the practice of it.

We must always before prayer stir up our soul to an attentive thought and consideration of the presence of God.—Not only is God present in the place where you are, but He is most particularly in your heart, and at the very bottom of your spirit, which He vivifies and animates with His divine presence, being there as the heart of your heart and the spirit of your spirit [ii. 2].—Go gently and simply in this business, without being in a hurry about it [ii. 5].—You must not stay too long in these general affections without converting them into special and particular resolutions for your correction and amendment [ii. 6].—At the end of the prayer gather a little nosegay of devotion from the considerations you have made. It sweetens the rest of

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the day [i. 9].—Those who have walked in a beautiful garden do not leave it willingly without taking in their hand four or five flowers, that they may smell them and hold them on their way. So when our mind has thought over some mystery by meditation, we ought to choose one or two or three points which we have found most to our taste and most fitting for our progress, that we may think over them during the rest of the day, and smell them spiritually [ii. 7]. —You must above all, when you leave your meditation, retain the resolutions and deliberations which you have taken, that you may practise them carefully the same day. This is the chief fruit of meditation, without which it is indeed often not only useless but harmful [ii. 8].

It is in this way by quickening the will to a more steadfast daily obedience that Meditation purifies the soul. And whether it bring with it spiritual dryness or conscious ecstasy makes no difference in its usefulness, as long as the will is stirred. It is obedient service in the conscious presence of God, not warm feelings of affection and desire that Meditation is meant to inspire.

If you have no consolation, however great be your dryness, do not trouble about it, but continue to hold yourself in a devout attitude before God. How many courtiers there are who go a hundred times a year into the presence-chamber of the Prince without hope of speaking with him, and only to be seen of him and to pay their respects. So ought we to come to holy prayer, purely and simply to pay our respects and to bear witness to our faithfulness.

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And if it should be pleasing to the Divine Majesty to speak to us and to hold converse with us by His holy inspirations and interior consolations, this will doubtless be a great honour and a most delightful pleasure. But if it does not please Him to give us this grace, and He leaves us there without speaking to us, as if indeed He did not see us, and as if we were not in His presence, yet we ought not to leave it. On the contrary, we ought to rest there before His sovereign goodness, in a devout and peaceful attitude [ii. 9].

Francis leaves no simple detail of the devout life unnoticed. He speaks of the way in which Morning and Evening Prayer may be made definite and real. Then he turns to the Prayer of Prayers, the Holy Eucharist, which was to him the sum of all devotion and the daily source of all his power of ministry and spiritual happiness. He begins his chapter *Of the most Holy Mass and how to hear it* with this beautiful tribute to the Sacrament of Divine Love.

I have not yet spoken to you at all of the Sun of spiritual exercises, the most holy, sacred, and all sovereign Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Mass, the centre of the Christian Religion, the heart of devotion, the seal of piety, an ineffable mystery which includes within itself the abyss of divine charity, and by which God, by applying Himself really to us, communicates to us of His greatness, His graces, and His favour. Prayer offered in union with this divine Sacrifice has an unspeakable force.—Make therefore every effort to be present daily at the Holy

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Mass, that you may offer with the Priest the Sacrifice of your Redeemer to God His Father, for yourself and for the whole Church [ii. 14].

And with his accustomed definiteness Francis speaks of the way in which we should guide our thoughts and prayers at the Eucharist, so as to make full use of this opportunity of Devotion. Later on he urges frequent Communion as the rule for those to whom it is possible, and suggests a suitable and simple way of preparation. We cannot fail to note the admirable simplicity and persuasive skill with which Francis presents the appeal to Communion before those men and women of the world to whom attendance at the Altar was not an established way of life.

The Saviour has instituted the venerable Sacrament of the Eucharist which really contains His Body and His Blood, that he who eats of it may live eternally. Whosoever frequently makes use of it with devotion, so strengthens the health and life of his soul that it is nearly impossible for him to be poisoned by any kind of evil affection [ii. 20].—Begin the evening before to prepare for the Holy Communion by aspirations and ejaculations of love, going a little earlier to bed, that you may be able to rise a little earlier in the morning.—If the worldly-minded ask you why you communicate so often, tell them that you do it that you may learn to love God, to purify yourself from your imperfections, to deliver yourself from your misery, to console yourself in your afflictions, to strengthen yourself

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in your weakness. Tell them that two kinds of people should communicate frequently: the perfect, because being well disposed they would do great wrong if they did not draw near to the source and fountain of perfection; the imperfect, that they may be able rightly to reach out to perfection; the strong, that they may not become weak; the weak, that they may become strong; the sick, that they may be healed; the healthy, that they may not become sick; and that for yourself, as being imperfect, weak and sick, you have need of frequent communion with Him, Who is your perfection, your strength, your medicine [ii. 21].

The whole wealth of the Church's treasures must be laid under contribution for the inspiration of our daily life. The Angels, the Saints, and the Faithful Departed have their own part to play in enriching and uplifting our lives. Their ministry is used by God to bind us nearer to Himself.

Since God very often sends us inspirations by His angels, we ought also frequently to send to Him our aspirations by the same means. The holy souls of the departed who are in Paradise with the angels, do also for us the same office of inspiration by their holy prayers.—Honour, revere, and respect with a special love the Blessed and glorious Virgin Mary. —Be very familiar with the Angels, regard them frequently as invisibly present in your life. And above all, love and revere the Angel of the Diocese in which you live, those of the persons among whom you dwell and especially your own angel. Pray frequently to them, praise them at all times, and

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seek their aid and help in all your affairs, whether spiritual or temporal, that they may co-operate with you in your intentions [ii. 16].

The Bible is the constant companion of the soul that would make progress in the devout life. "Be reverent towards the Word of God." But God has those who can interpret His message to us besides the writers of Holy Scripture. "Have always near you some good book of devotion." "Read also the Histories and Lives of the Saints, in which you will see, as in a mirror, the picture of the Christian life." Even when they are more the subject of admiration than of imitation, they nevertheless give a strong general desire for the holy love of God.

After outlining in this way the exercises of devotion, Francis speaks of the different virtues of the Christian life, holding up the ideal of perfection in each separate excellence of the Christian character. With rare insight and attention to the most minute detail, and with the utmost tenderness and love, he sketches the beauty and the helpfulness of each virtue, and shows how each may be gradually gained by the soul that really seeks God. With admirable illustrations he wins and holds our attention, and makes the least popular graces of the devout life seem attractive, desirable, and possible for us all to acquire. There is a thoroughness in his analysis of such virtues as Patience and Humility, which is born of his own deep experience.

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Be patient, not only with respect to the burden and principal of the afflictions which come upon you, but also with respect to the details and accidents which arise from them.—We must have patience, not only to be ill, but to be ill with the illness which God wishes, in the place where He wishes, and amongst the persons whom He wishes, and with the inconvenience which He wishes.—Complain as little as possible of the wrong which has been done you, for, as a rule, it is certain that he who complains commits sin, inasmuch as self-love always makes us think the injuries greater than they are. Above all, never complain to persons who are ready to be indignant and to think evil. If it is expedient to complain to any one, you should do it to souls who are calm and who love God [iii. 4].—True humility makes no pretence of what it is, and scarcely even utters the language of humility [iii. 5].—You wish to know what are the best kinds of humiliation. I tell you plainly that the most profitable to the soul and most agreeable to God are those which we get by accident or by the condition of our life, because we have not chosen them, but have received them as God has sent them; and His choice is always better than our own [iii. 6].—Those fail greatly who in the street are like angels and at home are like devils [iii. 8].—One of the good exercises of meekness which we can practise is that of which the subject is ourselves, never being fretful against ourselves nor against our imperfections [iii. 9].

That frequent spirit of worry which comes to us in the midst of our work is due to a forgetfulness of God's help and interest in all the affairs of our life. We need to "rest wholly upon the providence of

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God." Francis uses one of his homely analogies to point the lesson.

Do like little children, who with one hand cling to their father, with the other gather strawberries and blackberries along the hedges. In the same way, while you are amassing and handling the good things of this world with one of your hands, hold fast with the other the hand of your heavenly Father, turning from time to time to Him, to see if He approves of your household arrangements or your occupations [iii. 10].

Francis knew what perfect obedience meant as the safeguard of true self-discipline and the test of genuine humility.

Obey when you are ordered to do something pleasant. Obey in things indifferent. Obey in things difficult, rough and hard, and your obedience will be perfect. Obey indeed gently without reply, promptly without delay, gaily without grief, and above all obey lovingly, for the love of Him Who for love of us became obedient even to the death of the Cross.—To learn to obey your superiors easily, comply easily with the will of your equals [iii. 11].

Love and friendship are dealt with tenderly and wisely by one who was himself a very Apostle of Love, who had fathomed the depths of true spiritual friendship in his own life. It is the love of God which purifies all relations of affection and gives stability to all the ties of true friendship. Indeed love is the

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great safeguard against all the misuses of our gifts and the surest defence against all temptation.

Have you never seen a great wood fire covered with ashes? When you come ten or twelve hours after to look for the fire, you only find a little in the midst of the hearth, and indeed have trouble to find that. Yet there it is, for you find it there; and with it you can relight the rest of the charcoal which has gone out. It is the same with charity, which is our spiritual life amid great and violent temptations. For temptation, throwing its delights into the lower parts, covers the whole soul, as it seems, with ashes, and reduces the love of God to the last spark. For it no longer appears in any part but the middle of the heart, at the very bottom of the spirit. Indeed it almost seems as if it was not there, and there is great difficulty in finding it. Yet it is there indeed, since, though everything be in trouble in our soul and in our body, we have the resolution to consent in no way to sin, nor to temptation, and the delight which pleases our outward man is displeasing to the inward man [iv. 4].

Except for one short period in his life, Francis had always himself experienced great happiness and spiritual fervour in all his devotion. But he knew well its true value and its danger and was ready to endure spiritual dryness. " Devotion does not consist in the gentleness, sweetness, consolation, and sensible tenderness of the heart, which provoke us to tears and sighs and give us a certain agreeable and savoury satisfaction in some spiritual exercises."

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He knew that to carefully preserve the fruits of consolation already received was the best way to prepare for the temptations of dryness. In all relations of life, and in all duties, peace comes from referring all things immediately to God. "We always do enough when God works with us."

Thus Francis reviews all the possibilities of devotion in the life of those who, while they are engaged in the busy duties of the world, yet wish to serve God faithfully and to grow in the sense of His Presence. To him the whole of life presents a sphere of consecration. All the innocent amusements of social life—playing, dancing, tilting, fives, and all games of recreation—keep the mind and the body ready for God, and in all the little acts of daily life God is offering us opportunities of discipline and service.

The more we read the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, the more we realise it to be a transcript of Francis de Sales' own life of devotion, and it stirs us to new hope and fresh effort, just because we feel that he has transmitted to us through his writing that unswerving conviction of the beauty of Holiness, and that sure reliance upon the prevailing power of God, which make the higher life worth living. Other writers of devotion, like Jeremy Taylor, have repeated many of his maxims and have dwelt upon the same themes with equal sincerity and faith, but no one has ever revealed so wide a sympathy with all the

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duties of secular life, nor appealed so tenderly and so persuasively to that instinct of devotion which lies hid in the heart of the men and women of the world. He speaks with no uncertain voice. He has very definite truths to declare and very clear rules of life to lay down. If he has found peace and joy himself in the abounding work of life, it is because he has kept near to God and sought Him in the fellowship of His Sacramental gifts. And perhaps the secret of strength and happiness in our own lives to-day may be found in obedience to his eager injunction, "Keep yourself always near to Jesus Christ crucified, spiritually by meditation, really by the Holy Communion."

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VI

WILLIAM LAW AND "A SERIOUS CALL TO A DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE"

A SERIOUS call to a devout and holy life adapted to the state and condition of all orders of Christians is the name of a book which is more often spoken of to-day than read. Few English books of devotion have exercised so great an influence as this enthusiastic appeal, with which in 1729 William Law broke in upon the religious apathy of the eighteenth century. Its method is quite different from that of any other devotional book. While it reveals the deep spiritual insight of Thomas a Kempis, and the wise knowledge of the world which marked Francis de Sales, and has all the magnificent enthusiasm of *The Spiritual Combat*, it abounds in a subtle and fascinating wit, which no other writer had ever yet dared to invoke as an ally on the side of righteousness.

A.

William Law was born in 1686 and lived until 1761. The seventeenth century had proved a time

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of great distress for the English Church. The history of the Church in the reign of Elizabeth had vindicated the Catholic nature of the English Reformation and had assured the continuity of Church life both in faith and government. That steady assertion of Church principles had been made in the face of repeated attempts on the part of such vigorous Separatists as Cartwright and Travers to introduce a Presbyterian discipline. Upon Hooker's learned justification of the principles of the English Church had followed the supremacy of Laud, who in the practical discipline of Church life had emphasised afresh the spirit of Catholic reform.

But the Laudian movement, supported as it was by the royal favour and authority, was rather a triumph of external discipline than a renewal of the spirit of devotion. It was this which was really needed after the sad trials and desolating conflicts of the sixteenth century. There was not that inner sense of religion and personal consecration among Churchmen which could give immediate and lasting vitality to the work of Laud. That was no fault of his. If the men of his generation had been able to exhibit a life of holiness and consecration such as his own, there would have been a fertile soil in which his work would have borne abundant fruit. But it was a grand defect of the Laudian policy that the fortunes of the Church had been bound up in men's minds with the vicissitudes of one political party.

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The cause of the Church had been inevitably identified with the extravagant use of the royal power. In the eyes of a nation, restless with uncertainty and roused to suspicion, the Church was made to appear the opponent of political freedom and the enemy of personal liberty. In the conflict that ensued, the Church suffered sorely at the hands of its Puritan oppressors. The liturgy was proscribed under severe penalties. The clergy were deprived. Church property was alienated. Episcopacy was banned.

It was no wonder that the Church took a prominent part in the national welcome which greeted the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. It was natural that the Church should take a leading part in bringing back a Prince who would safeguard and preserve its rights, and feel nothing but joy at the public recognition of its spiritual authority and traditional prestige. The nation too, as a whole, was unreservedly glad to see the Church come by its own again. The experience of a few years' Puritan tyranny had been a severe lesson in the perils of ecclesiastical innovation. But though the cause of the Church had triumphed, the errors of an earlier age could not be immediately undone. The Church had become inseparably involved in the political issues of the day and had thereby lost much of her moral independence.

In the Restoration, much as Queen Anne finally

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succeeded in achieving, the Church still stood out in men's minds as a political factor, rather than as a vigorous and independent teacher of spiritual truth and the bearer of Divine grace. Two generations had passed in which the clergy had been but poorly trained. They had been reduced frequently to beggary, and losing much of their social influence and position, had lost their accustomed opportunities of directing public thought and education. There was not wanting in the ranks of the clergy a succession of men of brilliant intellect and massive erudition. It was this very age that earned for the English clergy the title *stupor mundi*, the wonder of the world. The names of Berkeley, Bingham, Wake, and Butler prove that the epithet was not undeserved. But for the most part intellectual interest was very low and spiritual earnestness was almost dead in the life of the clergy. There was no real personal grip of spiritual realities, either in priest or people. The heart of the nation lay sleeping, outworn by the harassing struggle of half a century of suffering and strife.

Indeed religion was now become a subject of scorn and ridicule. The new discoveries of science were beginning to fill men's minds with wonder and to absorb the attention of the thoughtful. Deism brought a philosophic idea of God, which was an open contradiction of the Christian story. Such writers as Toland, Tindal, and Mandeville showed how

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anti-Christian Deism had become, while the latitudinarian Bishop Hoadly showed how the denial of the miraculous and supernatural element in Christianity had affected even the faith of professed Churchmen. Bishop Butler throws an interesting light on the rational spirit of the age, when in his advertisement to *The Analogy of Religion* he said, "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of enquiry, but that it is now, at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

Amidst this open and profound disregard of religion, even the most earnest sometimes despaired of the Church. Archbishop Leighton saw in it "a fair carcase without spirit," and Bishop Butler himself, even at the moment when his own brilliant *Analogy of Religion* was routing the discomfited hosts of Deism, gave up all hope of the continuance of the life of the Church, so weak to his eyes was the hold which it had upon the realities of spiritual life and power. Butler was inspired with that moral earnestness and passion for righteousness which marked the spirit of William Law. But where Butler despaired, Law saw his opportunity. *A Serious Call to a Devout*

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and Holy Life was the book that awoke in that dead age the slumbering spirit of devotion, and kindled afresh that light of moral earnestness and that flame of true religious enthusiasm, which since the days of William Law has never quite died down.

B.

Such was the spiritual temper of his age. Of his own life there is very little indeed to record. Born at King's Cliffe, in Northamptonshire, in 1686, William Law was the son of the village shopkeeper, and showing a keen love of study he was sent to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he obtained a sizarship in 1705. Six years later he was ordained deacon and elected Fellow of his college. But on the accession of George I. there arose the question of the oath of allegiance to the monarch of a new dynasty.

It was not the first time that Churchmen had been placed in this difficult position. After the Revolution in 1688, there were those who had found it impossible with a free conscience to take the oaths of allegiance to William and Mary, because they had already taken similar oaths to James II. They had willingly sacrificed their position, their incomes, and their prospects, and were known as the Nonjurors. The death of James in 1707 had not released them from their obligation. Their obedience had been tendered not only to the monarch himself, but

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also to his heirs and lawful successors. The difficulty indeed was increased when by an Act of Parliament they were required to abjure the pretended Prince of Wales, who was to their consciences the lawful heir of James II., and to acknowledge William and each of his successors according to the Act of Settlement as rightful and lawful king. This oath, involving both allegiance and abjuration, became a necessary condition of employment both in Church and State.

And now again on the accession of George I. another Act was passed which required the acknowledgment of George as rightful and lawful king and the abjuration of the pretended Prince of Wales. William Law felt himself bound in conscience to refuse to take new oaths of allegiance and abjuration. In 1716, therefore, he was deprived of his Fellowship at Cambridge and lost all prospect of employment in the Church. It was a signal proof of that sincerity and singleminded thoroughness, which were so eminently characteristic of William Law, and which are reflected so clearly in the forthright directness of *A Serious Call*.

It was one of the most serious hindrances to the religious progress and influence of the Church in the eighteenth century, that through the schism of the Nonjurors so many of the keenest minds and most spiritual characters were withdrawn from the general life of the Church. It was to this that Law owed his seclusion and his abstention from the more

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public activities of the Church. But in his retirement he was not debarred from taking a vigorous part in religious controversy in defence of Church principle and the Catholic Faith. The Deists were denying the reality of the Incarnation, the Latitudinarians were denying the reality of the Divine life of the Church. Against both these impugners of the traditional faith of the Church, Law fought vigorously and trenchantly, but always courteously and fairly.

At Putney, where Law had lived for a while as tutor to the father of Gibbon the historian, he gathered round him many admirers and disciples. Among these were counted Charles and John Wesley. The publication of *A Serious Call* in 1729 established his reputation and brought him into fresh prominence, but he never made many friends. In 1739 he retired to King's Cliffe again, where he spent the remaining years of his life, assimilating more and more the mysticism of Böhme, and interesting himself in making careful and generous provision for securing an education in Church principles for the children of the Parish. In this placid retreat the years of his life ran out. *The Spirit of Prayer* and *The Spirit of Love*, published about 1752, show at once the depth of his Mysticism and the secret of his own content with the isolation of his life. In 1761 he passed to his rest. Perhaps no higher testimony could be sought for the holiness of his life

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than the words of Gibbon: "He left the reputation of a worthy and pious man, who believed all that he professed and practised all that he enjoined." To practise all that *A Serious Call* enjoins is to attain indeed to a high ideal of earthly holiness.

C.

Every great book reflects the character and spirit of its author. It is so pre-eminently with William Law. For the chief characteristics of William Law were sincerity and enthusiasm, and no book rings more truly with the tone of unequivocal sincerity and moral earnestness than *A Serious Call*. In many ways the book challenges comparison with *The Imitation of Christ*. Both of them deal with the foundation principles of personal religion. Both of them come out of an age that was destitute of spiritual power. For if the fourteenth century was an age of religious formality, moral turbulence, and grave political confusion, the eighteenth century has become a byword for indifference, apathy, and indecision, both in the political and religious life of England. But Law and Thomas a Kempis were very different in the particular surroundings of their personal lives. Thomas lived the ordered and sheltered life of regular monastic habit, secluded from political troubles and from harsh contact with the daily problems of a difficult world. Law in the

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earlier part of his life mixed fully in the social life of London, and was not free from the entanglements in which the course of English political life involved every public man of his age. Both had the same love of the disciplined life. Thomas found his ideal in the ordered life, ready to his hand, of the Brothers of Common Life, Law had to fashion it for himself out of the midst of the difficulties of everyday life. Already at Cambridge, in his undergraduate days, he began to live by rule. The very first rule which he laid down for the guidance of his life sounded the note of reality and serious purpose, which rang through all his later teaching. He resolved "to fix it deep in my mind that I have one business upon my hands—to seek for eternal happinesss by doing the Will of God."

It is there that all men of holiness are at one. The Will of God gathers all the saints together in one common devotion. It has been the theme of each writer's enthusiastic appeal. But Law adopts a method of appeal which is in many ways new, a method suited admirably to the spirit of this age, as its success eminently proclaimed, but a method which was novel. Hitherto devotional writers had moved within the sphere of earnest religious exhortation, of clear and definite spiritual counsel, of solemn presentation of the great truths of Christianity, of attractive and winning appeal to the deepest moral and spiritual instincts of those for

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whom they had written. But Law sets himself to reveal an enthusiasm which lies deep in the heart of every man by appealing to the sense of reason, to the love of truth, to the desire for reality, to the common sense of the ordinary man. In an age when the profession of Christianity had become the subject of frequent ridicule, Law vindicated the reasonableness of the Christian belief, and the practical superiority of the consistent, thorough-going Christian over both the lukewarm believer and the indulgent worldling.

And he makes his appeal, not by direct dogmatic teaching, nor by any elaborate argument, but by drawing subtle character sketches of the ordinary men and women of his day, revealing with the most deft and delicate touches the inconsistencies and weaknesses which were to be seen in the most familiar actions of daily life and conduct. Each character has his own fictitious name, which in most cases is a Latin one, suggesting the virtue or the vice which is the subject of illustration. Law draws his pictures with inimitable skill. They present the most lifelike portraiture, relieved with delightful touches of wit and depicted with the utmost kindliness and good humour. Law was careful to explain why most of his figures portrayed the infirmities rather than the excellences of human character. He hoped that every particular folly which we see would naturally turn itself into an argument for the wisdom and

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happiness of a religious life. So the more he enumerates the follies, anxieties, delusions, and restless desires which go through every part of a life devoted to human passions and worldly enjoyments, the more we must be affected with that peace and rest and solid content which religion gives to the souls of men. *Caelia*, the grumbler, is an exhortation to contentment. *Fulvius*, the youth of leisured disorder, preaches the disciplined life. *Mundanus*, the successful man of business, teaches the necessity of heavenly mindedness. *Susurrus*, the unkind gossip, becomes an argument for the habit of kindly intercession. But there are other characters, which portray with great attractiveness the beauty of the Christian life, like *Ouranius*, the good priest, *Paternus*, the good father, and *Miranda*, the woman of devoted life.

The power of this method of appeal is proved by the wide influence which *A Serious Call* has enjoyed. John Wesley, after reading it, said: "I was convinced more than ever of the impossibility of being half a Christian." Dr. Johnson's testimony is equally striking. "When at Oxford," he says, "I took it up expecting to find a dull book, and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an over-match for me. And this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of religious enquiry." John Keble's appreciation of the solemn earnestness and austerity of

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the book is shown in the words with which he rebuked Froude. "Froude, you said one day that Law's *Serious Call* was a clever book. It seemed to me as if you had said the Day of Judgment would be a pretty sight."

So the method of Law is justified. But though he does not obtrude any theology upon his reader, his moral appeal is based upon a true doctrine of God. As *Paternus* tells his son, God is all love and wisdom and goodness. God is love, yea, all love, and so all love, that nothing but love can come from Him. And the Christian religion is nothing else but an open, full manifestation of His universal love to all mankind. There is no wrath that stands between God and us, but what is awakened in the dark fire of our own fallen nature, and to quench this wrath, not His own, God gave His only begotten Son to become man. The precious blood of His Son was not poured out to pacify Himself, Who in Himself had no nature toward man but love. But it was poured out to quench the wrath and fire of the fallen soul and kindle in it a birth of light and love. As Law said in his reply to John Wesley, "You would have a philosophical religion. But there can be no such thing. Religion is the most plain, simple thing in the world. It is only 'We love Him, because He first loved us.'" All begins with the eternal Love of God. And upon this love is based God's claim to man's obedience. "First of

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all, my child," says *Paternus* to his son, "worship and adore God, think of Him magnificently, speak of Him reverently, magnify His providence, adore His power, frequent His service, and pray unto Him frequently and constantly."

That Love, as Law shows, is God's great appeal. "He loves us in order to make us good." The true human life is a real imitation of God. Man is to imitate the Love and the Will of God. His power to live the life of Divine imitation lies in his acceptance of the Divine grace, which, through the merits of Christ's atoning death, comes by the ordered channels of the Sacraments. "There is nothing wise, or holy, or just, but the great Will of God. No beings, whether in heaven or on earth, can be wise or holy or just, but so far as they conform to this Will of God. It is conformity to this Will that gives virtue and perfection to the highest services of Angels in Heaven. And it is conformity to the same Will that makes the ordinary actions of men on earth become an acceptable service unto God."

And of the Atonement as the basis of all human perfection, Law says: "The Christian's great conquest over the world is all contained in the mystery of Christ upon the Cross. The Cross of Christ is the glory of Christians, not as it signifies their not being ashamed of a Master that was crucified, but as it signifies their glorying in a religion which was nothing else but a doctrine of the Cross,

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that called them to the same suffering spirit, the same sacrifice of themselves, the same renunciation of the world, the same humility and meekness, the same patient bearing of injuries, reproaches, and contempts, and the same dying to all the greatness, honours, and happiness of this world, which Christ showed upon the Cross. To have a true idea of Christianity, we must not consider our blessed Lord as suffering in our stead, but as our Representative, acting in our name, and with such particular merit as to make our joining with Him acceptable unto God. The Scripture sets forth our blessed Lord as our Representative, acting and suffering in our name, binding and obliging us to conform to all that He did and suffered for us."

Law makes very little explicit mention of the activity of the Holy Spirit. But in all that he says of the exercise of the human will in obedience to the Will of God, he presupposes the controlling influence of the indwelling Spirit. In speaking of what he means by enthusiasm, he says, "Every Christian, as such, has the firstfruits of the Spirit, a seed of life, which is his call and qualification to be always in a state of inward prayer, faith, and holy intercourse with God. All the ordinances of the gospel, the daily sacramental service of the Church, is to keep up and exercise and strengthen this faith, to raise us to such an habitual faith and dependence upon the light and Holy Spirit of God, that by

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thus seeking and finding God in the institutions of His Church, we may be habituated to seek Him and find Him, to live in the light, and walk by His Spirit, in all the actions of our ordinary life. This is the enthusiasm in which every good Christian ought to endeavour to live and die."

It is necessary to emphasise this dependence upon the sacramental ministries of the Spirit, for it is very easy for a hasty reader to misconceive the teaching of so true a mystic as William Law, and to imagine that in his insistent demand upon the constant exercise of human will, he is relying upon the inherent energies of unaided human nature. It is Law himself, however, who warns us "not to make a saint of the natural man." For him all human happiness and perfection begin and end in God.

Such is the doctrinal foundation upon which Law's brilliant work is based. But the theological teaching does not obtrude itself upon the view. What he sets before us is the palpable evidence of life, which is manifest to the eye of the ordinary observer. He shows by his fascinating sketches of character that the strong life, the effective life, the life that tells and arouses the respect of the truly reasonable and thorough man, is the life of the consistent Christian. It is the man who, professing to be a Christian, lives a pagan life, whom Law sets out to shame in his own eyes.

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It is notorious that Christians are now not only like other men in their frailties and infirmities. This might be in some degree excusable. But the complaint is, they are like Heathens in all the main and chief articles of their lives. They enjoy the world, and live every day in the same tempers and the same designs and the same indulgences as they did who knew not God, nor of any happiness in another life. Everybody that is capable of any reflection must have observed, that this is generally the state even of devout people, whether men or women. You may see them different from other people so far as to times and places of prayer, but generally like the rest of the world in all the other parts of their lives, that is, adding Christian Devotion to an Heathen life [i.].

Christianity is not only *a* life, as one among many, but it is *the* life, the supreme happiness, the one thing that satisfies and endures. It is the pearl of great price, for which all else must be surrendered. Thus Law brings every individual life to the test of perfect sincerity. If Christianity is anything at all, it is the one thing that matters, the one pursuit that must be maintained with relentless perseverance and utmost devotion. And that, because it is the outcome of God's Love and the opportunity of man's obedience. Christian devotion covers the whole of life.

Devotion signifies a life given or devoted to God. He therefore is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world,

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but to the sole Will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life parts of piety, by doing everything in the name of God and under such rules as are conformable to His glory [i.]. —If therefore we desire to live unto God, it is necessary to bring our whole life under this law, to make His glory the sole rule and measure of our acting in every employment of life. For there is no other true devotion, but this of living devoted to God in the common business of our lives [iv.].— We must devote, not only times and places to prayer, but be everywhere in the spirit of devotion, with hearts always set towards heaven, looking up to God in all our actions, and doing everything as His servants, living in the world as in a holy temple of God, and always worshipping Him, though not with our lips, yet with the thankfulness of our hearts, the holiness of our actions, and the pious and charitable use of all His gifts [iv.].—Worldly business is to be made holy unto the Lord, by being done as a service to Him and in conformity to His Divine Will [iv.].

There is no single action of life, no sphere of man's work, no moment of his leisure, which is not caught up into the inspiration of this high purpose. What men need above all things is a more conscious and a more continuous direction of the will. " The first and most fundamental principle of Christianity is an intention to please God in all our actions." To intend to please God in all the actions of life, as the happiest and best thing in the world—this is the

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great principle of human life, which Law so powerfully and so persuasively vindicates. In the characters which he sketches, he shows the various forms which self-deceit takes in human life, and exposes the irrational weaknesses and foolish inconsistencies of those who in the ordinary pleasures and duties of life are satisfied with any lower ideal. Thus, in the spirit of kindly love, he holds up before us the mirror of our own folly, makes us laugh at our own self-conceit, and shames us gently into better things.

We may be surprised at the wonderful variety of the lifelike characters which illustrate Law's keen insight into the secret motives of the human heart. The figures are sketched in with such a light touch and with so few strokes of the pen. There is *Julius*, the formal Christian. In a couple of lines he stands clearly pictured before us. "Julius is very fearful of missing prayers. All the parish supposes Julius to be sick, if he is not at Church." There is *Caecus*, the rich man, of good breeding and very fine parts, the embodiment of happy self-conceit. "Caecus no more suspects himself to be proud than he suspects his wants of sense." There is *Calidus*, the busy merchant, living in a perpetual rush and whirl. "Calidus will tell you with great pleasure that he has been in this hurry for so many years, and that it must have killed him long ago, but that it has been a rule with him to get out of the town every Saturday

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and make the Sunday a day of quiet and good refreshment in the country." The worldly minded *Flavia*, who "would be a miracle of piety, if she was but half so careful of her soul as she is of her body"—the light-hearted *Feliciana*, whose "heart has been too gay and cheerful to consider what is right or wrong in regard to eternity"—*Cognatus*, the wealthy parson, "a sober, regular clergyman, of good repute in the world and well esteemed in his parish, who is very orthodox and full of esteem for our English liturgy, and if he has not prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, 'tis because his predecessor had not used the parish to any such custom, who makes it a matter of conscience to keep a sober curate whom he hires to take care of all the souls in the parish at as cheap a rate as a sober man can be procured—*Leo*, the good-natured fellow, who loves good company and "has concerned himself so little with religion that he hardly knows the difference betwixt a Jew and a Christian."—What wonderful types these figures are of everyday insincerity. Gibbon's judgment is indeed a true one. "His precepts are rigid, but they are founded on the gospel. His satire is sharp, but it is drawn from the knowledge of human life. If he finds a spark of piety in his reader's mind, he will soon fan it into a flame. And a philosopher must allow that he exposes with equal severity and truth the strange contradiction between the faith and the practice of the world."

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Law is careful to show that devotion is more than the verbal offering of prayers. But he is equally concerned to show that there can be no life of devotion without the earnest study of the art of prayer. The necessary duties of daily work may absorb most of our time. But the worker will make opportunity to learn how to pray, to school himself in the discipline of prayer, while the person of leisure will consider that his freedom from the cares of necessary labour is a call to greater dedication to the life of prayer. There is scarcely any book which is a more convincing and more suggestive manual of prayer than *A Serious Call*. Its rules are based upon the tried experience of William Law himself. He is full of helpfulness in his suggestions with regard to the use of Scripture in our prayers.

When at any time, either in reading the Scripture, or any book of Piety, you meet with a passage, that more than ordinarily affects your mind, and seems as it were to give your heart a new motion towards God, you should try to turn it into the form of a petition and then give it a place in your prayers. By this means you would be often improving your prayers, and storing yourself with proper forms of making the desires of your heart known unto God [xiv.].—If people were to collect the best forms of devotion, to use themselves to transcribe the finest passages of scripture-prayers, if they were to collect the devotions, confessions, petitions, praises, resignations, and thanksgivings which are scattered

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up and down the Psalms, and range them under proper heads, as so much proper fuel for the flame of their own devotion, if their minds were often thus employed, sometimes meditating upon them, sometimes getting them by heart, and making them as habitual as their own thoughts, how fervently would they pray, who came thus prepared to prayer [xiv.].

There is no detail of prayer about which Law is not ready to give definite counsel, and always his advice is practical and sound. Both in the use of set forms of prayer, in the value of a set place and time for prayer, and in the manner of approach to God, he speaks in no uncertain tones.

The generality of Christians ought to use forms of prayer at all the regular times of prayer. It seems right for every one to begin with a form of prayer. And if in the midst of his devotions, he finds his heart ready to break forth into new and higher strains of devotion, he should leave his form for a while and follow those fervours of his heart, till it again wants the assistance of his usual petitions. This seems to be the true liberty of private devotion. It should be under the direction of some form, but not so tied down to it but that it may be free to take such new expressions, as its present fervours happen to furnish it with, which sometimes are more affecting and carry the soul more powerfully to God than any expressions that were ever used before. —All people that have ever made any reflections upon what passes in their own hearts, must know that they are mighty changeable in regard to devotion.

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It is therefore highly necessary to provide against this inconstancy of our hearts, by having at hand such forms of prayer as may best suit us when our hearts are in their best state, and also be most likely to raise and stir them up, when they are sunk into dulness [xiv.].

The search after the most excellent attributes of God which the Scriptures reveal will not only help us to approach God with a better sense of His Majesty and Greatness, but will also store our minds with language more suited by its dignity to be the vehicle of prayer.

When you begin your petitions, use such various expressions of the attributes of God, as may make you most sensible of the greatness and power of the Divine Nature. For these representations of the Divine Attributes, which show us in some degree the majesty and greatness of God, are an excellent means of raising our hearts into lively acts of worship and adoration [xiv.].—Although prayer does not consist in fine words or studied expressions, yet as words speak to the soul, as they have a certain power of raising thoughts in the soul, so those words which speak of God in the highest manner, which most fully express the power and presence of God, which raise thoughts in the soul most suitable to the greatness and providence of God, are the most useful and most edifying in our prayers [xiv.].

Much of Law's own careful scheme of daily devotion is adaptable to our own use. No one has

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ever insisted more strongly on the need of preparation and on the necessity of growth in prayer proportionate to our general progress in knowledge and experience. For this purpose we must jealously use all the opportunities of self-improvement, which even the busiest life offers. For "though the spirit of devotion is the gift of God and not attainable by any mere power of our own, yet it is mostly given and never withheld from those who by a wise and diligent use of proper means, prepare themselves for the reception of it."

Part of the helpfulness of Law's suggestions about prayer is that he proposes very definite subjects for the different hours of devotion, so that no time is lost in uncertainty at the moment of prayer, and the use of a clear and fixed scheme brings all the subjects of prayer before us in due rotation, so that there is no neglect nor want of due proportion.

The plan of daily devotion which Law had arranged for himself so methodically, and which he describes so carefully, deserves the most attentive study. He particularly emphasises the dignity which belongs to praise and thanksgiving. It may not be possible for us to adopt his own habit, and chant the psalms in our private prayers as a mark of joy and thankfulness. But we can pay careful heed to his appreciation of the true place of Praise and Thanksgiving in our private devotion. He would make Praise and Thanksgiving and the

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oblation of self to God always the fixed subject of our first prayers in the morning.

There is no state of mind so holy, so excellent, and so truly perfect, as that of thankfulness to God. Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most. It is not he who gives most alms or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice. But it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God willeth, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it. All prayer and devotions, fastings and repentance, meditation and retirement, all sacraments and ordinances, are but so many means to render the soul thus divine and conformable to the Will of God, and to fill it with thankfulness and praise for everything that comes from God. If any one would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and all perfection, he must tell you to make it a rule to yourself, to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you. For it is certain that whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing. Could you therefore work miracles, you could not do more for yourself, than by this thankful spirit, for it heals with a word speaking, and turns all that it touches into happiness [xv.].

There is no more beautiful figure in the book than the picture of Ouranius, the village priest, who by Intercession has prayed away all his haughtiness of temper and contempt for the poor folk of the countryside. "Every soul in it is as dear to him as himself.

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And he loves them all, as he loves himself, because he prays for them all, as often as he prays for himself." For "there is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him."

Such are the high levels of life along which *A Serious Call* would lead us. In his own day William Law's book awoke a new enthusiasm in the Church and laid the foundation of that new spirit of religious revival which, blossoming first in the earnest devotion and missionary zeal of George Whitefield and John Wesley, afterwards yielded abundant fruit in the arousal of a new sense of Church life through the disciplined enthusiasm of the Tractarian movement.

The lesson which William Law recalls and enforces with such realism and intensity is the lesson which re-echoes from saint to saint through all the ages—*Gloria Dei vivens homo*—the life of man is the glory of God. Obedience to the Will of God is the one strength and happiness of human life. Law's early resolution, with which he fortified himself for the battle of life, reveals the true spirit of saintly service. He who would serve God and use his opportunities to the full must fix it deep in his mind that he has but one business upon his hands—to seek for eternal happiness by doing the Will of God. It is good to have the experience of earlier ages confirmed by the witness of one who lived in days so much nearer to our own, and to be assured anew, in

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the words of William Law, "that there is nothing wise or great or noble in a human spirit, but rightly to know and heartily worship and adore the great God, that is the support and life of all spirits, whether in heaven or on earth."

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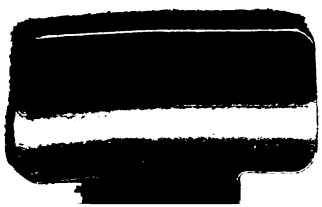

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